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Hope, T. S. (2004). The effectiveness of the discretionary financial award, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), in a tertiary college in the South West of England. DEd thesis. Oxford Brookes University.

**The Effectiveness of the Discretionary Financial Award, the
Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), in a Tertiary College
in the South West of England**

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The degree is awarded by Oxford Brookes University

The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Oxford
Brookes University for the Degree of Doctorate in Education

June 2004

Abstract

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is a discretionary financial award being developed to support young people from low-income households who undertake full-time courses in further education (FE). South West College* is part of the national pilot scheme for this award initiated by the government in September 1999, which currently involves 56 Local Education Authorities.

The aim of this research was to examine the effect of the EMA on participation, retention and achievement in full-time further education courses for young people from low-income households in South West College; and to identify the extent to which a financial incentive can improve post-16 recruitment, retention and results on advanced level (academic and vocational) courses. Theme generating student and staff perceptions were sought on the impact of the EMA. College data were analysed to allow for a comparison of an EMA and non-EMA cohort and any tentative identification of the extent to which remuneration had affected student participation, retention and achievement.

Findings suggest that for full-time advanced level students from low-income backgrounds enrolling on a course in 1999, the EMA may have had a positive effect on retention, but that participation and achievement appeared unaffected in South West College. The findings differs from the national evaluation results that identify increased levels of both participation and retention, but have yet to comment on achievement. Student and staff perceptions of the EMA were that it is a good idea in further education and that it should help students in paying for additional and indirect educational expenses.

The EMA appears to support widening participation and success in further education; however critical evaluation suggests that cultural factors, as well as financial or structural factors, may impact on students' decisions to participate, stay on and achieve at advanced level. The EMA may not generate a more highly skilled workforce to support economic growth (DfES 2002a).

* The name of the case study college has been changed to protect its identity in accordance with ethical considerations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people and institutions:

Dr Joe Harkin (Director of Studies) and **Dr Hilary Cremin** (Supervisor) for taking over supervisory duties at short notice. The detail, clarity and direction, along with constructive support, given by Joe and Hilary enabled me to complete this thesis. **Professor Sonia Blandford** for giving support at times when I believed I could not succeed.

The Case Study College for allowing the research to take place and providing access to students, staff and data.

Learning Resource Centre (Case Study College) for the use of books and journals.

Liz Fisher for helping to source books for this thesis.

Graham Phillips for support at the start of this doctoral research.

Sue Maguire (Centre for Research in Social Policy) for her help in locating literature on student funding in post-compulsory education at the beginning of this research.

Oxford Brookes University Doctorate in Education academic and research support staff.

Patric Ovenden for giving me the motivation and determination to continue with this thesis. The encouragement you gave me and the consideration you showed made it possible. I love you and I want to make you proud.

Josef Ovenden-Hope for coming into my life during the writing of this thesis. Your laughter broke through the isolation of writing and made me smile. You are my sunshine and I love you.

I dedicate this thesis to you and your wonderful father.

Contents

Heading	Page Number
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Contents	iv
Contents of Tables	vii
Glossary	x
Opening Quotation	xi
Chapter One – Introduction	1
The Case Study	6
Participation, Retention and Achievement	9
Chapter Two – Literature Review	12
The Sociological Context	15
Structural Functionalism	16
Structural Marxism and Structural Neo-Marxism	17
Cultural Neo-Marxism	19
Interactionism	21
Motivation to Learn	23
Widening Participation	25
The International Experience	29
Financial Support for Students in the UK	32
Equity and Achievement	34
Improving Retention	41
Chapter Three – Methodology	44
Data Collection and Analysis	49
Preliminary Data Collection and Analysis	50
Discussion Group	50
Subsequent Data Collection and Analysis	52
Questionnaires and Comment Sheets	52
Semi-Structured Interviews	54

Documentary Evidence	56
Sample Selection	58
Design Implementation	62
1999 Student Cohort Discussion Group	62
1999 Student Cohort Questionnaire and Tutor Comment Sheet – Year One	63
1999 Student Cohort Interviews	65
Director of Studies Interview	66
Tutor Interviews	66
1999 Student Cohort Questionnaire – Year Two	67
1997 and 1999 Student Cohorts – College Data	68
The Generation of Theory	68
Chapter Four – Findings	71
Theme 1 – General Perceptions about the EMA	75
Student and Staff Awareness of the EMA	75
Administration of the EMA	81
Level of Funding of the EMA	90
Aims of the EMA	93
Theme 2 – The Effectiveness of the EMA	98
Student Participation in FE	98
Student Retention in FE	102
Student Achievement in FE	107
Chapter Five – Discussion	115
Summary of Findings	115
Contextualising Practice	121
Widening Student Participation in FE	121
Improving Student Retention in FE	127
Raising Student Equity and Achievement in FE	129
Limitations and Modifications	135
Implications and Suggestions for Further Research	138
References	142
Appendices	152

Appendix A – Student Invitation to Discussion Group	153
Appendix B – Student Pilot Questionnaire (Year One)	154
Appendix C – Student Questionnaire (Year One)	156
Appendix Ci – Student Questionnaire (Year One) with Coding	158
Appendix D – Letter to Tutors Comment Sheet	160
Appendix E – Student Interview Schedule	161
Appendix F – Interview Schedule for Director of Studies	162
Appendix Fi – Interview with Director of Studies Transcript	163
Appendix G – Tutor Interview Schedule	169
Appendix H – Student Questionnaire Year Two	170
Appendix I – The six models of EMA funding	172

Contents of Tables

Table A:	Case Study Data Collection Technique by Year and Number of Respondents
Table 1	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One EMA Recipient Respondents to the Question ‘Was the EMA explained clearly to you prior to starting college?’.
Table 2	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One Non-EMA Recipient Respondents to the Question ‘Was the EMA explained clearly to you prior to starting college?’.
Table 3	College Student Participation Figures of Further Education Students on Full-time Advanced Level Courses Starting in 1997 and 1999.
Table 4	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘When did you apply for the EMA?’.
Table 5	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Have you received payment of the EMA yet?’.
Table 6	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Have you received any payment of the EMA for this academic year?’.
Table 7	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving the EMA?’.
Table 8	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving the EMA?’.

Table 9	College Student Participation and Retention Figures of Further Education Students on Full-time Advanced Level Courses Starting in 1997 and 1999.
Table 10	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Is the EMA a realistic level of funding i.e. does it provide enough financial support to fund your studies: e.g. books, paper etc.?’
Table 11	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Is the EMA a realistic level of funding i.e. does it provide enough financial support to fund your studies: e.g. books, paper etc.?’
Table 12	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Did the possibility of receiving the EMA influence your decision to stay on in post-16 education?’.
Table 13	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Has the EMA had a direct affect on your staying on your course in the College?’
Table 14	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Has the EMA had a direct affect on your staying on your course in the College?’
Table 15	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Has the EMA had a direct affect on your attendance at College?’
Table 16	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Has the EMA had a direct affect on your attendance at College?’
Table 17	Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Has the EMA had a direct affect on your achievement levels at the College?’

Table 18 **College Student Achievement Figures of Further Education Students on Full-time Advanced Level Courses Starting in 1997 and 1999.**

Glossary

DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
FE	Further Education
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FENTO	Further Education National Training Organisation
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
ONS	Office of National Statistics data
PSI	Policy Studies Institute
TTA	Teacher Training Agency

“Men and women who succeed in getting at least one A Level have a higher lifetime earnings than if they had worked during that extra period of study and invested the surplus in the stock market. The pity is that the market-place does not and cannot signal clearly enough that this is the case.

If returns for individuals can be high, then the wider social returns on good education are high too, even if they are notoriously difficult to measure. If it has more skill available to it, the economy can grow more rapidly without reaching inflationary bottlenecks. With lower unemployment and a skilled labour force, social security spending is reduced, thus allowing a compensating increase in investment and spending for any given level of public expenditure. Above all, productivity levels are raised as human capital stock improves. The World Bank reports that the social returns from educational investment and training in underdeveloped countries are as high as 20 or 30 per cent; while some British estimates for post-school training have produced similar figures.”

(Hutton, 1996, pp. 191-192)

Chapter One – Introduction

The range of academic and vocational education opportunities available to 16-19 year olds in the UK through further education is wider than ever before (Knight and White, 2003). However, it has been argued that young people from low-income families are less likely to remain in education after compulsory schooling ends than young people from more affluent backgrounds (DfEE, 2000a). The consequences of low participation in further education for young people from low-income backgrounds are lower levels of academic and economic achievement, for both the individual and society (Metcalf, 1997). The present study is concerned with the effects of a recent government education policy introduced with the aim of improving post-compulsory education participation, retention and achievement for 16-19 year olds from low-income families.

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is a discretionary financial award being developed by the current UK government to support young people from low-income households who undertake full-time courses in further education. It is based on the recommendations of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) (Kennedy, 1997), the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) (Herbert and Callender, 1997) and the Lane Committee (DfEE, 1998b), who suggested that a financial incentive to participate in further education should encourage more young people from low-income backgrounds to continue in education past compulsory schooling, stay on their courses and succeed at the end. It was argued that the EMA would provide the remuneration necessary to stop young school leavers seeking employment through economic necessity.

The EMA was introduced as a pilot scheme in 1999 and provided a means-tested grant to full-time students (aged 16-19) in post-compulsory education through 15 Local Education Authorities (LEAs). The EMA pilot was initially intended to run for three years using the original 15 LEAs, however the nature and scope of the EMA has changed since its inception. In September 2000 a further 41 LEAs were selected by the government to provide the EMA to students from low-income families. The government, acknowledging that education participation and personal finance is a complex issue, decided to 'test out a number of assumptions and options' (FEDA, 1999, p.5) in piloting the EMA.

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is part of the government's commitment to help young people have the opportunity to fulfil their educational potential. The pilot schemes are testing whether making weekly payments to young people encourages participation, retention and achievement in further education. A number of different models of the scheme are being tested across fifty-six Local Education Authorities in England. (DfES, 2002, p.1)

Under the EMA initiative the amount and distribution of financial support varies depending on which of the six models (or two transport models) the LEA in which the student resides is piloting (see Appendix I). However, all 16-19 year olds from low-income families who undertake appropriate full-time courses at schools or colleges within the EMA pilot areas will receive some form of financial support. The full allowance is payable if the total parental taxable income does not exceed £13,000. For those with a total parental income of between £13,000 and £30,000 (£20,000 and £30,000 for the London pilot), a progressively tapered EMA, down to a minimum weekly allowance of £5, is payable. In addition to the weekly allowance, termly bonuses for retention and bonuses for successfully meeting learning goals will also be paid.

The political climate in which the EMA was introduced was one of economic and social necessity (Kennedy, 1997). The Labour government continued with the previous Conservative government's focus on lifelong learning and widening participation in further education (initiated by the Widening Participation Committee chaired by Helena Kennedy, QC in 1994). Labour offered a humanist approach to educational policy through the introduction of financial support in further education. However, the economic necessity underlying this benevolent policy had been realised before the election of the Labour government in 1997. The Conservative government had been aware that United Kingdom's economic and social stability necessitated rapid economic growth, a state that could only be developed with the support of a more highly skilled workforce (Hutton, 1996). The Labour government recognised (DfES, 2002a) that only by developing the qualifications and skills of the post-16 population through a national economic agenda of widening participation in further education, would economic and social cohesion be supported (Kennedy, 1997).

The EMA was therefore introduced by the government with short-term and long-term aims. In the short-term the EMA was intended to increase the number of young people from low-income families in full-time further education, resulting in higher levels of educational success. In the long-term the EMA was intended to produce a more highly skilled workforce that would secure rapid economic growth, through increased productivity levels and reduced social security expenditure. In a press statement on increased education spending in England for 2002-2005, Morris (then Education Secretary for the newly created Department for Education and Skills) confirmed the purpose of reform in further education.

Too many adults have been failed by the system in the past and many have not reached their potential. We've got to develop the skills of these adults, both for their own quality of life and if we are going to close the productivity gap with countries such as the US, France and Germany. By reforming and investing in further education and by getting more adults into training, we will tackle this problem head on. (DfES, 2002a, p.2)

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) commissioned Loughborough University, the Institute for Employment Research, the National Centre for Social Research and the Institute of Fiscal Studies, to undertake a large-scale evaluation of the EMA pilot to assess its impact on student participation, retention and achievement (Kennedy, 1997). The research was conducted over four years initially (starting academic year 1999-2000) and was intended to provide the largest source of data on young people in United Kingdom. Data collected by the research will be analysed after each academic year of the EMA pilot. The data will be used to assess the effectiveness of the EMA from year one and will be made nationally available, influencing both government and public support for the allowance (Ashworth et al., 2001; Legard et al., 2001; Maguire et al., 2001; Maguire et al., 2002; Ashworth et al., 2002, Knight and White, 2003).

The government aims to assess the effectiveness of the EMA in the short-term can be established by comparing levels of student participation, retention and achievement in further education (DfEE, 2000) pre-EMA and post-EMA. The outcome of the government's long-term aims for the EMA, however, remains to be seen, but will be indicated by Office of National Statistics data (ONS) on economic growth.

In 2002, three years into the EMA pilot, the government released a statement of its intention to introduce the EMA nationally.

From September 2004, Education Maintenance Allowances will be available throughout England. 16-19 year olds will get up to £30 a week, depending on parental income, with additional bonuses for attendance and achievement. (DfES, 2002a, p. 1)

This enhancement of EMA provision suggests that the positive feedback of government based evaluations (Ashworth et al., 2001; Legard et al., C., 2001; Maguire et al., 2001; Maguire et al., 2002; Ashworth et al., 2002), has created belief that the long-term aims of the EMA will be met.

In the light of the governments' purpose for the EMA, the aims of the present study are to investigate the effect of the EMA on participation, retention and achievement for young people from low-income households on full-time advanced level academic (Advanced Level GCE) and vocational (Advanced Level GNVQ) courses in South West College; and to examine relevant literature in order to identify the extent to which a financial incentive could improve post-16 participation, retention and achievement. The issues will be examined in terms of the perceptions of students claiming the EMA, tutors administering the EMA and a manager overseeing the EMA. Crude statistical data will also be used to compare pre-EMA and post-EMA student success within South West College. DfES data on the EMA will be used to compare the national average levels of participation and retention (achievement levels will not be available until 2004-5) with South West College's EMA cohort data.

The present study is underpinned by the following four research questions:

- What is the EMA?
- Why was the EMA developed?
- What are the aims of the EMA?
- Will the EMA be effective in meeting its aims?

The research questions emanate from the researcher's inherent interest in social and educational issues. As a sociologist, lecturer and manager in a further education college.

the researcher has always maintained a keen interest in social and educational policy, particularly policy affecting post-compulsory education such as 'lifelong learning and widening participation'. In 1998 the researcher became aware of the government's decision to pilot the EMA and knew that the college in which she worked would be incorporated within one of the original 15 LEAs piloting the scheme. Interested in the concept of the EMA, the researcher wanted to contextualise it and evaluate its potential effectiveness, which necessitated further investigation. Also, realising that the college, as part of the pilot, was regarded as a suitable 'case', the researcher became aware that the introduction of the EMA to the college presented an opportunity for new and original research. By critiquing a pilot college the research could offer a limited critique of national policy.

On first sight the EMA appeared to offer a practical solution to the class inequalities witnessed by the researcher in further education. Financial support would become available to those students in need of it. The researcher considered the anecdotal reasons for students not participating in further education, and for leaving courses before finishing, locating the EMA within the debate on young people, class and full-time employment. She also considered the potential benefits of financial assistance for current students in paying for education expenses, such as travel and equipment, while at college. After much consideration and further reading however, the researcher identified inconsistencies in the logic of the EMA. For example, financial reasons may not be the main reason for non-participation in further education and achievement may not be equated with attendance. The researcher wanted to discover whether young people would benefit educationally, resulting in the potential to improve their socio-economic status, through the EMA. To this end the effectiveness, or success of the EMA in achieving increased levels of participation, retention and achievement in further education among young people from low income backgrounds, would have to be examined through research.

The present research was designed as an attempt to meet the aims identified above, aims which were underpinned by the research questions stated. To reach this end South West College became the case study. The present study is therefore a local study that seeks to evaluate national policy by illuminating the effectiveness of the EMA in South West College. Full ethical consideration was given to the use of South West College for research

purposes and adherence to the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA, 1992) was maintained throughout. Additionally the Westminster Institute of Education ethical research standards of 'Do no harm. Do some good' (Oxford Brookes University, 2000) were applied to the study.

The Case Study

South West College opened in 1993. It is a purpose-built tertiary¹ college on the western outskirts of a city in the South West. The city and the surrounding area have a population of approximately 55,000. The city is a major retail and business centre and the administrative headquarters for the County. During the last 25 years the City has gone through a period of rapid development. There are two 11-16 comprehensive schools serving the City, as well as a special school and two private schools. Students come to the South West College from these different schools, as well as two (11-16) schools in nearby towns. Students also transfer to the College from other neighbouring towns. In recent years the numbers coming to the College from some distance away has increased. This has reflected the reputation the College has established as a nationally recognised centre for excellence.

Before the College existed there was a Sixth Form Centre in the city which catered for about 500 full-time students and a free standing Adult Education Centre. In September 1993 the College enrolled 742 full-time students. In 1999-2000, the college enrolled 6,713 students on further education courses. This equates to 3,050 full-time equivalent students. There were 1,715 full-time students aged 16 to 18. Overall, 74% of the full-time equivalent students were aged 16 to 18. Approximately 1% of students were from minority ethnic backgrounds. Of the 6,713 students, 58.8% were female.

By September 2002 South West College had grown to over 2,600 further education students, but it is not intended or likely that full-time further education student numbers will grow much beyond this. South West College has more than 9,000 part-time students and a rapidly growing higher education (HE) provision, with part-time and full-time

¹ A tertiary college combines the functions of an FE college and a 6th Form college in providing a full range of academic and vocational courses for 16-19 year olds. Tertiary colleges are also distinguished by the LEA as a major or sole provider of post-16 education in a particular geographical area. They differ from FE colleges in that they do not have to have a significant proportion of adult and part-time learners.

courses at degree and diploma level. In October 2002 more than 450 full-time HE students were studying at the College, together with 150 part-time higher education students

As a Tertiary College a range of academic and vocational courses are offered to full and part-time students. South West College offers more than 40 A Level subjects and a range of vocational courses at 1st Diploma or National Diploma Level (or Intermediate or Advanced GNVQ). There is also significant provision for students with Special Educational Needs. During the autumn of 2001, the College was inspected by a team led by Ofsted under the new inspection model. The report was published in December 2001. The College was awarded eight Grade 1s, the other five grades were all Grade 2. These grades place South West College as one of the leading colleges in the country and contributed to the award of Beacon College status.

The vast majority of students are based at the main site on the outskirts of the city. In addition, the college has open learning centres in the city centre and a nearby town. A further site three miles away, is used for some full-time foundation and access to higher education (HE) courses. Since 1993, the college has grown rapidly. A new media and technology building was opened in September 2000. The financial position of the College has been more secure than most colleges in the sector. The budget has grown each year and was about £18 million for 2002/2003.

Despite the relative wealth of South West College, it is located in one of the poorest counties in the United Kingdom (The Economist, 2000). The county is rural and maritime with a population of 485,600 in 1997. It is the second largest county in the region in terms of area, but has the lowest population density. Its geographical position has ensured that the county has remained, until recently, one of the more remote and isolated parts of Britain. This has resulted in the county maintaining much of its own identity in traditions and culture, which have influenced the socio-economic development of the county (CCC, 1999).

Even though the county has a history of mining, over a century of growth as a holiday area and some more recent development of manufacturing industry, the county remains essentially rural in character. Only 31%, or just under one third of the population live in

towns of over 10,000 inhabitants, compared with four-fifths in England and Wales: while 99.5% of the population of the county is white. This is the second highest proportion in the country (ONS, 1991). The rural nature of the county has resulted in the majority of students at the college travelling relatively long distances to attend. Students commonly use public transport (particularly buses) based on restrictions to car parking at South West College.

The average total earnings figure for the county is 24% below the average for the UK. No other county in the UK has lower adult earnings levels than the county in which South West College resides (ONS, 1998). Unemployment in the county remains a severe problem with an unemployment rate of 6.3% in 1999 compared to the national average on 4.8% (CCC, 1999). In January 1999 four of the 20 TTWAs (Travel-to-Work Areas) with the highest unemployment rates in England were situated in the county (CCC, 1999). The economy of the county is heavily reliant on sectors that have a seasonal pattern of employment. The largest sector is the tourism industry, where much of the employment created is temporary, part time and often poorly paid.

In 1999 the county was given Objective One European funding status, a status given to counties in countries in Europe that have a gross domestic product below 75% of the European Union average (LGIB, 2003). The importance of the county's socio-economic standing for the present study is that students in the case study college would be expected to experience greater levels of financial hardship, a factor that has been argued to negatively affect participation, retention and achievement rates (Steedman and Young, 1996).

In 1999 South West College was given model 1 of the pilot EMA to introduce to students for a period of, initially, three years. Model 1 provided 16 year old students on full-time further education courses with up to £30 per week direct to their bank accounts, £50 termly and £50 at the end of the course, dependent on a parental income of under £30,000 per year. It would seem reasonable to hypothesise that the students in South West College may be affected more by the EMA than students in LEAs located in more affluent counties. Therefore if the EMA is intended to widen participation in FE for young people from low income families, the effects of the EMA should be clearly evident in South West College.

because the levels of social and economic deprivation are higher than many of the other areas within the pilot LEAs. The present study will investigate the EMA within South West College, an excellent socio-economic example within the pilot that offers to illuminate the effectiveness of the EMA locally and possibly nationally.

Participation, Retention and Achievement

Student participation refers to the number of students who enrol on a new course of study. Student retention refers to the number of students who remain on a course compared to the number of students who started it. Student achievement is shown by comparing the number of students achieving a qualification with the total number completing courses that are intended to lead to a qualification. Effectiveness, in relation to the EMA at South West College, refers to the success of the discretionary award in improving student participation, retention and achievement. In order to achieve the aims of the present study to investigate the effect of the EMA on participation, retention and achievement for young people from low-income households on full-time advanced level academic (Advanced Level GCE) and vocational (Advanced Level GNVQ) courses in South West College, thorough background knowledge of existing literature in the area and associated areas was established and a review of new developments in research methodology conducted. The literature examined was also used to identify the extent to which a financial incentive could improve post-16 participation, retention and achievement, providing a methodological and theoretical context for an original contribution to the field of study.

The case study used South West College for the collection of data through discussion groups, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and college statistics. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, as part of an attempt to illuminate the effectiveness of the EMA at South West College and to acknowledge the importance of data triangulation in attaining both reliable and more valid data. The research was hoped to be democratically evaluative (MacDonald, 1977), enabling South West College to 'benefit' from the data collected.

It was decided that student and staff perceptions would be sought on the success of the EMA in South West College in order to discover themes within the aims of the research. The focus of the case study would be the perceptions of students from low-income

backgrounds – those entitled to the EMA on advanced level academic and vocational courses. Only advanced level students would be used based on the length of advanced level courses being two years and therefore allowing enough time for the effect of the EMA to be recognised. Both academic and vocational advanced level students would be used to ensure the representativeness of the data. The data collected on perceptions about the EMA would be cross-referenced to college statistical data. The college statistical data on advanced level student participation, retention and achievement would be collected for an EMA (1999-2001) and a non-EMA (1997-1999) cohort and the results compared to allow a tentative identification of the extent to which the EMA may have affected student participation, retention and achievement in South West College. The analysis of the primary data may offer support for an examination of sociological and political foundations of the EMA located in the literature.

The EMA has its history in economic, political, as well as educational reform. Chapter One has introduced the context of the EMA, defining what it is and locating it within government policy. The aims of the research have been outlined and justified as research in an area of local and national interest. The desire of the researcher to examine the effects of the EMA on students from low-incomes in a case study college has been outlined through the methodology adopted.

Chapter Two will debate relevant literature reviewed to establish the context of the research and to assess the potential of the policy for achieving its aims. An examination of the relationship between educational policy and political agendas over time will take place to locate the introduction of the EMA in government policy making. A sociological context for the research will be established to position existing studies on educational inequality and to examine theoretically the possible outcomes of the EMA policy. Student motivation, widening participation in education, financial support for students, student achievement and student retention will all be scrutinised by origin and through existing research to locate these issues within the aims of the research.

Chapter Three contextualises educational research historically to locate the research methodology applied in this case study. Ethical issues affecting educational research will be considered. Sample selection, data collection, analysis and implementation used in this

case study to achieve the aims of the research will be discussed. The strengths and weaknesses of the methodology will be examined and presented in order to satisfy their suitability for the purpose.

Chapter Four presents the data collected from the case study and its implications for the aims of the research. The data will be presented through the themes generated by the research, allowing data collected by different methods to be shown together. Tables will be used as exemplars of typical responses. Interview transcripts will be used to elucidate data.

Chapter Five discusses the research findings through a re-examination of the literature reviewed and the data analysed for the case study. A discussion of student participation, retention and achievement will take place in light of the data analysed for the case study and the theoretical issues that emerged from the sociological examination of educational inequality. Research limitations will be identified and modifications explored. The outcomes of the research will be examined. The unfolding thesis of the research will be summarised. A number of recommendations for further research that have arisen as a consequence of this case study will be made.

The following chapter establishes the context of the research through an examination of relevant literature. The potential of the EMA for achieving its aims of widening participation in further education and supporting economic growth through a more highly qualified workforce is assessed. The effectiveness of the policy is examined through the relationship between political agendas and educational change. Educational inequality is located within a sociological context to theoretically investigate the possible outcomes of the EMA policy. Existing research into widening participation in education, financial support for students, student achievement and student retention is examined to theorise the effectiveness of the discretionary financial award, the EMA, in South West College and in a wider educational context.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

In 1994 the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) established a Widening Participation Committee, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC, to advise the government on ways in which it could encourage more people to participate and succeed in further education (Kennedy, 1997). This committee commissioned the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) to investigate secondary research on financial support for students in further education (Herbert and Callender, 1997). The report of the Widening Participation Committee (also known as The Kennedy Report) (Kennedy, 1997) and of the PSI (Herbert and Callender, 1997), along with the recommendations of the Lane Committee (DfEE, 1998b), encouraged government interest and support for the introduction of a pilot Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in 1999. It was argued that a financial incentive may help to stop post-16 students from low-income families from potentially seeking employment after compulsory schooling, from dropping out because of financial pressures or reducing their results by taking part-time employment to support themselves during the course (Callender and Kempson, 1996; Kennedy, 1997; Herbert and Callender, 1997).

The short-term aim for the EMA was to improve student participation, retention and achievement in full-time further education courses. However, the EMA also offered the potential for a long-term outcome, which was the production of a more highly skilled workforce. If the EMA was successful it could support the national economic agenda of rapid economic growth (without inflationary bottlenecks) through the creation of a more highly skilled workforce (Hutton, 1996). A workforce that would ensure increased productivity levels, reduced social security expenditure and improved social cohesion. As Charles Clark, Secretary of State for Education and Skills in 2002 stated:

The learning and skills sector has never been more important to the government's agenda than it is today. It is pivotal to our overriding objective to strengthen Britain on the dual and inextricably linked foundations of social justice and economic success. (DfES, 2002a, p. 2)

It would appear that the EMA was developed in the hope that it would improve Britain's economic position. By achieving its aim of a more qualified population, the EMA would support a more highly skilled workforce emanating from all social spheres that could undertake employment appropriate for a developing economy. James Callaghan's (then

Labour Prime Minister) Ruskin College speech in 1976 stated Labour's position on the link between education and economic success (Callaghan, 1976), a position that is maintained by the present Labour government:

The goals of our education, from nursery school through to adult education, are clear enough. They are to equip children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive place in society and also to fit them to do a job of work. Not one or the other, but both... In today's world higher standards are demanded than were required yesterday and there are simply fewer jobs for those without skill. (Callaghan, 1976, p.3)

However, what is evident in the New Labour government is the added concern with social justice, a concern that the EMA supports through its focus on economically disadvantaged young people. This recognition of economic *and* social factors as important to societal transformation has been supported by recent research (Keep and Mayhew, 1998; Ashton and Green, 1996; Couch et al. 1999), as Keep (2000) suggested:

...more skills, on their own, may well not be enough to transform performance – whether of the individual, the organisation, or of a particular locality or nation state. Higher levels of skills may be necessary, but not a sufficient condition for improvement and their ability to act as a catalyst for change may only work in combination with other factors – both structural and attitudinal. (Keep, 2000, p. 21)

Therefore despite understanding what the EMA is; why it was developed and the aims established to reach that goal, the question still remains as to whether the EMA as a structural policy within a social justice process can be effective in meeting the short-term and/or long-term aims established by the government. This case study is intended to offer insight into the outcomes that the EMA has or could deliver.

The liberal consensus of previous decades was overturned in 1979 with the election of Thatcher's New Right Conservative government (Hoyle and John, 1995). This time has been seen as a political, social and economic watershed, because it challenged the coalition stance of successive Conservative and Labour governments in their production of agreed social, political and economic policies (Hutton, 1996). Education was an area in which this liberal consensus had prevailed and which the Conservative government needed to destroy (Hoyle and John, 1995). In the 1980s "*it was the organisational and policy-making field*

that Thatcherism was to have its greatest impact” (Hoyle and John, 1995, p.41). Teachers lost autonomy and control of education with the introduction of The Teacher’s Pay and Conditions Act (1987) and with the Education Reform Act (1988).

The 1990s and early Twenty-first century has seen education undergo a radical transformation in which successive governments have created education policies that are reinforced by state quangos, such as the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO). Also, the economic boom of the 1980s had passed and financial austerity had tightened state control over education spending and reinforced the accountability of all education institutions, an accountability introduced in the Thatcher years (Hoyle and John, 1995). It would appear that the previous Conservative government failed to fully engage in the role that education and training could play in supporting the economy, as Hutton (1996, p.187) elucidates:

The British approach to training typifies the weaknesses of the neoliberal approach. The government has become aware that there are substantial returns from training, both to the individuals concerned and the wider economy, but has never felt that its own financial position could be so improved by raising skill level that the investment could be self-financing.

The New Labour government, elected in 1997, *has* realised the potential of improved education and training for the economy and placed it on the national agenda (Kennedy, 1997). The government has put policies in place that appear to ‘widen participation’ in education and training, such as the EMA in 1999.

Prior to the Kennedy Report in 1997, there had been little analytical research on the funding of students in further education (Herbert and Callender, 1997). Britain has a limited history of conducting research specifically on the relationship between student participation and financial support in further education, as Herbert and Callender, 1997, p.26 stated:

...there is a dearth of research on the role of financial support and its effect on initial access to post-compulsory education in general. and to further education in particular...No research studies were found which compared the impact of different types of funding or

financial support on individuals' decisions to enter further education.

For this reason it has been decided that a review of literature should not be implemented as a strategy for assessing the effectiveness of the EMA in South West College. as there would be little useful or comparative data to draw from. Instead the literature review will be used to examine relevant research, theories and concepts in order to identify the extent to which a financial incentive could improve post-16 participation, retention and achievement.

British studies until the late 1990s that had examined participation, retention and achievement in education had not considered the impact of financial support, focusing instead on social class (Willis, 1977; McRobbie, 1978; Halsey et al. 1980). Recent studies in the UK (Herbert and Callender, 1997; Davies, 1999; Callender and Smith, 1999) have, however attempted to explain why students leave college in relation to finances. Studies in the United States (Coleman, 1966) and Australia (Dearden and Heath, 1996) have produced quantitative analyses of large data sets to model the effects of financial aid on student participation and retention. I shall attempt to examine these studies in relation to the aims of my research, while addressing the historical sociological context from which they emanate.

The Sociological Context

Social inequalities in the education system have resulted in a wide range of sociological theories that have attempted to explain them. A crude dichotomy of these theories will be presented located in either a structural or cultural perspective, as an attempt to establish the context from which today's studies on student participation, retention and achievement in education originate. The decision to present the theory through a structural/cultural divide was based on an attempt to reflect the importance of both the economic and social on the outcome of government policy (Keep, 2000). The sociological theory and studies examined will also be used to develop tentative suggestions about the effectiveness of the aims for the EMA.

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism was the dominant social perspective in education in the 1960s and 1970s (Kirby et al, 2000). The work of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was very influential in this development, particularly the idea that children internalise the values and belief systems of the society in which they live (Durkheim, 1938). Utilising the work of Durkheim, Parsons (1951) argued from the same perspective that the main function of education was the development of social solidarity through the transmission of a collective culture. It could be suggested, based on this argument, that any social inequality in society, such as differential student participation, retention and achievement in further education, is simply a reflection of the social structure and its social systems and should therefore be reinforced, as part of collective culture, through the education system. Consequently if structural functionalism was used to illuminate the aims of this study, it could be argued that levels of student participation, retention and achievement in further education are a reflection of the social inequalities inherent in society and should not be addressed for fear of damaging social equilibrium. Therefore the EMA, by focusing on young people from low income households and offering social justice (Ainley, 1999), could be seen as a policy that could, if successful, threaten the infrastructure of society.

Parsons (1951) claimed that the education system exists as part of a cultural meritocracy. Functionalists however have been criticised for assuming that society, and by association education, is meritocratic (Rex, 1961; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). In the UK criticisms of this view were generally statistical and tied to the debate about the structure of the education system set up by the 1944 Education Act (Kirby et al, 2000). There were studies of social class, which demonstrated that children did not succeed according to merit: a major determinant of success was the social class of the father (Halsey et al, 1980). The Oxford Mobility Study, *Origins and Destinations* (Halsey et al, 1980), offered a devastating critique of the British educational system in the 1970s, demonstrating that boys from the higher social classes had far better chances of benefiting from education than those from the lower social classes. It was this emphasis on class and educational inequality that became accepted as the main area of educational research in relation to student participation, retention and achievement until the late 1990s.

This said, the safeguarding of the status quo (and consequently the maintenance of social inequality) has been supported by structural functionalists, such as Davis and Moore (1945), who suggested that the education system functions to allow talented individuals to achieve success. The structural functionalist position assumes societal consensus on the inequity of education being a fair reflection of differentiated individual potential (Marsland, 1996):

A successful modern society requires the maintenance of a system of economic incentives which reward initiative, enterprise and effort and penalize laziness and failure. This in turn implies commitment by the population at large – including the less successful and less well-aid – to defending the reward system. (Marsland, 1996, p.113)

An assumption also identified by Ecclestone (2002) in UK and European Union education policy and practice in the 21st Century:

Political and professional discourses embedded with consensus about the purposes of lifelong learning are suffused with themes of democracy, anti-elitism, social cohesion, inclusiveness and economic prosperity. Across the European Union, such discourse shift social policy goals from ‘equal opportunities’ to ‘inclusion’ within existing social formations. (Ecclestone, 2002, p. 16)

The suggestion is that social change has been reduced to changing the structure of education to improve economic competitiveness, such as widening participation in further education through policy such as the EMA in the hope of improved economic prosperity (Kennedy, 1997). Consequently it could be argued that the EMA cannot be seen as a threat to the UK’s infrastructure when theorised from a structural functionalist perspective, because the policy is operating within the existing social structure, as Blair (DfEE, 1998), speaking on behalf of the Labour government, reinforced when he said that ‘education is the best economic policy we have’.

Structural Marxism and Structural Neo-Marxism

An alternative approach to understanding differential education can be located in Marxism. There are many varieties of Marxism, all of which explain social inequalities by their relationship to the social structure, but differ in the way in which they apply the writing of Karl Marx (1818 – 1883). Structural Marxism focuses on how the structure of production

relationships has a determining effect on other aspects of society (Kirby et al, 2000). It is argued that all class-based social systems are based on the unequal ownership of the means of production. The ruling class own the means of production (the source of power and wealth) and the subject class own only their labour power. This stratification of society results in social inequality, because the subject class become exploited and oppressed by the ruling class, who utilise the subject class's labour to establish profit for themselves. Social inequality is supported and reflected by all institutions within the superstructure of that class based society, which in capitalism includes education (Althusser, 1968: Althusser and Balibar, 1966). This structural perspective suggests economic determinism, in that the infrastructure, or economic base, 'determines' the role of the superstructure and human consciousness. Consequently structural Marxism sees causation solely in terms of economic forces:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as the determining element. (Marx, 1959, p.791; orig. pub. 1894)

Contemporary educational research applying a structural Marxist approach can be found in the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976), who studied the relationship between the United States (US) education system and the economy. They stated that the US class structure was based on social inequality and that this inequality was perpetuated by the education system as part of the social system as a whole. Regardless of educational reforms and claims that the US was a meritocracy, Bowles and Gintis (1976) found that educational achievement was as dependent on parental socio-economic background as it had been thirty years before.

In relation to student participation, retention and achievement in further education, the arguments put forward by Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest that any inequalities in these reflect the wider inequalities in the social system. In other words, differential levels of participation, retention and achievement are class-based and sustained and maintained by the unequal distribution of capital. Structural Marxists would argue that equality of opportunity and achievement in further education can only be attained when the infrastructure of society changes from being class-based to egalitarian. Differential

education as part of the superstructure is determined by the structure of the economy. From a theoretical context, the application of structural Marxism to the EMA as policy suggests that it is based in economic determinism. If the aim of the EMA was to increase student participation, retention and achievement in further education through funding young people from low income households, then causation can be seen as economically driven.

Structural Neo-Marxism has adapted the economic determinism of structural Marxism by acknowledging the criticisms levied at this approach and claiming that Marx had himself rejected a simplistic one-dimensional view of causation (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995). Structural Neo-Marxists claim that although Marx gave priority to economic factors, he argued that the superstructure could also exert a force on historical struggle (Bottomore and Rubel, 1963). Therefore Neo-Marxists have been inspired by Marx, but have broken with conventional Marxist theory. Structural Neo-Marxists, such as Habermas (1976), retain the focus on the structure of production and its effect on other institutions, but recognises the impact of contemporary society on those relations. Consequently, if this perspective is applied to the aims of the present study, theoretically structural Neo-Marxism may accept the difficulty of effecting change in the infrastructure of society and accept that financial support (extra capital) for students in further education (the EMA) could improve student participation, retention and achievement (until the social system could be changed), because the need to sell their labour would not be so great with funding as without².

Cultural Neo-Marxism

Writing at a similar time to Bowles and Gintis (1976), cultural Neo-Marxist Bourdieu (1977) studied the way in which schools in France reproduced social and economic inequalities. Working on the cultural Marxist foundations established by Gramsci³ (1971). Bourdieu developed a concept known as ‘cultural capital’, which refers to the way families teach children their *cultural* norms and values that become their *capital* in the education system. Children from higher social classes have the same cultural capital as the teachers

² A recent study by Peter Davies (2000) establishes a link between the effects of part-time work and success in Further Education. His study is not located within Marxism, but it could be suggested that the basis of his hypothesis has similarities with the Neo-Marxist perspective.

³ The key contribution Gramsci (1971) made is his concept of hegemony. Hegemony means that capitalist rule does not depend solely on force, but involves the active consent of the population through ideas in society. The implication of this was that Marxist struggle must also include cultural and ideological struggle.

in the education system and are therefore more likely to succeed. Therefore educational institutions are based on ruling class ideologies and children from lower social classes do not understand the norms and values that are highly regarded in schools. Consequently, even if children from lower social classes have the same levels of intelligence as higher social class children, they will under-achieve because they lack the cultural capital to fully participate in the education system. In Britain, these ideas were applied by Paul Willis (1977) and Angela McRobbie (1978) who identified working class culture as the cause for class-based differential educational outcomes. It was argued that the working class culture valued manual labour and gender stereotypes, rather than academic pursuit. Children from working class families perpetuated these norms and values through their attitudes and behaviour in education.

Bourdieu (1977), Willis (1977) and McRobbie (1978) (and to some extent Bowles and Gintis (1976)) have been criticised for accepting that children are passive receivers of ideologies, that they are cultural ‘dupes’ who accept their failure in mainstream societal terms. If this approach were adopted for the study of student participation, retention and achievement in further education, it could be argued that financial support would make no difference at all, because the basis of their inequality, although arising from the social system, is sustained through cultural reproduction. Therefore, from this cultural Neo-Marxist perspective, the EMA would be ineffective in raising student levels of participation, retention and achievement in further education, because cultural norms and values have more influence on students’ decisions on whether to participate in further education, whether to stay on the course and how they do while they are on it. However, further education is not the bastion of the upper and middle class; in fact a large majority of young people go into post-16 education (Knight and White, 2003).

If the cultural Neo-Marxist ideas are correct, further education would not be an option for the majority of the working class, because they would not have the cultural capital to compete, rendering the EMA ineffective (it would provide the funding, but not the social knowledge for success). It could be argued that cultural Neo-Marxism is over-deterministic (Kirby et al, 2000) and that a complex array of variables affects students’ decision to participate in further education (Davies, 2000) (see section on motivation). It is interesting to note that this theoretical approach influenced compensatory education schemes in the

UK and US, such as the educational priority areas established by the Plowden Report (1967) and the US's pre-school education programme in low income areas known as Operation Headstart in 1968. These schemes attempted to compensate for the perceived cultural deficit of black and working class children and were established to provide the foundation for effective learning in the school system. Research demonstrated that Operation Head Start had no long term educational benefits for its participants (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995), which may explain the contemporary political emphasis on 'human capital' rather than cultural capital. Human capital refers to the skills, motivation and achievement that individuals and society invest to improve economic prosperity (Eccelstone, 2002). In the widening participation agenda identified by Kennedy (1997) (see section on Widening Participation) the necessity for human capital is clear.

Interactionism

Howard Becker (1951, 1971) influenced sociological research on education, establishing a perspective that examined interactions within educational institutions. It is argued that we develop a sense of who we are, or 'self', through our interactions with other people. In education teachers help (or hinder) the development of self, based on the range of social definitions that are given and applied to the student. Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) identified that teachers treated alleged 'intellectual bloomers' differently to other students (known as *labelling*), which resulted in those students having better outcomes. Although the methodology of this study has been criticised (observations of teacher/student behaviour were not made, conclusions being based on IQ scores) (Kirby et al. 2000), the concept of labelling has been applied to other studies. In the US Rist (1977) studied the way in which a teacher made students sit on tables according to *her* evaluations of their ability. These evaluations were based on social class and affected the educational experiences of the children. The disadvantaged children were labelled as educationally inferior to the others and this label was seen to 'stick'. The children also came to accept these labels and acted accordingly (self-fulfilling prophecy). Therefore this ethnographic study demonstrated that *subjective* evaluations became *objective* evaluations during the educational career of the student. In the UK Hargreaves (1967) had similar findings to Rist, but suggested that teachers' evaluations were not based solely on class, but were instead created through observations and confirmations of student behaviour and appearance.

Regardless of how these labels were established, the outcome for the student is considered to be the same by Interactionists – negative or positive self-fulfilling prophecy.

The application of labelling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy to this study suggests that the introduction of financial support for students in further education would make very little difference to participation, retention or achievement rates. because by the time students come to make choices about further education the ‘damage’ has already been done. By the age of 16 their educational prowess has been established (labelling) and students will have decided (self-fulfilling prophecy) whether to participate in further education or not. Offering them a grant to go to college will not, according to this perspective, affect their decisions, because the perceptions they have of their own educational ability determine their choices. It should be noted that this concept has been criticised for being over-deterministic, in that negative labelling has been seen to positively affect student participation, retention and achievement as part of their resistance to teacher evaluations (Mirza, 1992).

The sociological theory applied to this study offers alternative interpretations of the potential effectiveness of the EMA as national policy. It appears that the EMA as policy is based on a structural assumption that economic inequality has been the cause of post-16 educational inequality, as Bowles and Gintis (1976) argued in the 1970s. By providing a grant for young people from low income backgrounds, the government hopes to encourage greater levels of participation, retention and achievement in further education and thereby enhance Britain’s economic growth through a more highly skilled workforce (DfES, 2002a). Sociologists have argued that capitalism cannot exist without social inequality (Marx, 1959; Parsons, 1951); therefore to claim that economic growth can benefit all (offer social justice) is unlikely, because inequality *is* a capitalist system. The change offered by the EMA is to the structure of educational provision, not the structure of society, which remains capitalist and unequal.

As an incentive to learn, the EMA does not appear to take into account all the other variables outside of economic constraints that may act upon a student’s decision to stay on in further education after compulsory schooling. Hutton (1996) suggested that young people are not made aware of the individual benefits, such as increased personal income

for life, which better qualifications bring. If this is true, it suggests that a more cultural/social, as well as structural approach needs to be adopted that 'resocialises' young people into seeing the long-term importance of further education.

Motivation to Learn

It has been suggested that a complex set of variables influence a young person's decision to participate in further education (Davies, 2000). Psychologists and sociologists have examined motivation to learn from different frames of reference, which has resulted in a fragmented understanding of motivation in post-compulsory education (West, 1996). To psychologists motive is seen as an innate mechanism modified by learning, driven by deficiency, for example the need for better qualifications, or abundance, for example to attain greater satisfaction, focussing on the formation and development of subjectivity (Maslow, 1954). Psychological approaches to motivation tend to exclude the social and cultural influences accepted by sociological explanations of motivation (West, 1996). Both social scientific approaches perceive motivation as a process which creates and maintains the desire to move toward goals (Psychadvantage, 2004), it is the reasons behind this goal directed behaviour on which they disagree.

A result of motivational theory complexity has been 'the neglect of meanings given to behaviour and aspiration by learners themselves' (West, 1996, p. 205). West (1996) argued that only by understanding the biographical explanations of students who choose to participate in compulsory education could you begin to illuminate reasons for student participation, retention and achievement. It appears that even the students themselves may not be able to express the past and present reasons for educational participation, rationalising their motives through ideological debates, such as educational vocationalism, rather than subjective desire (West, 1996). In the UK individual economic insecurity (Keep, 2000) results in economic instrumentalism in education making sense, but it does not provide a full account of what motivates young people to learn:

In a world in which economic restructuring and casualization of the workforce have provoked deep insecurities among the middle as well as working class...learners' perceptions for the purpose of higher and continuing education may reflect an overriding economic instrumentality. It is a matter of holding on to or creating some security in fragile situations. This may produce a profound

tautology: student themselves mirroring, in their responses, the rationalizations for educational participation most dominant and respectable in wider culture, and in the process excluding, even repressing, the more personal parts of a story. (West, 1996, p.2)

To this end West (1996, p.218), using student biographies, developed an outline for “a cultural psychology of learning and authentic human agency” that connected “psyche with society, selves with others, the intimate with the social, meaning with experience, reason with feeling”, thereby offering an alternative to the ‘fractured’ accounts of student motivation traditionally applied. This present study, aware of the complex nature of student motivation hoped to achieve some understanding of student choices through the qualitative elements of the research process, such as the discussion group and interviews.

To offer a simple, but hopefully illuminative end to this section, two broad kinds of student motivation have been identified, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Minton, 2000).

Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is motivated by the potential for the individual to feel good or positive (Minton, 2000). For example, a young person may be successful in taking GCSE examinations and decided to enter further education to take advanced level qualifications because of their potential to do well and feel good about it. Intrinsic motivation is therefore focused on an individual’s inner drive to achieve success. Extrinsic motivation relates to factors that lie outside of the individual but which determine their behaviour (Minton, 2000). For example, the potential for a better job may act as the motive behind a young person deciding to take further qualification before entering the workforce. Therefore extrinsic motivation focuses on the external influences on an individual’s drive for success. Both kinds of motivation may influence an individual deciding on progression routes following post-compulsory education (Davies, 2000), although the EMA as policy offers only an extrinsic structural factor, money, as a motivation to learn (see section on Widening Participation). The problem for studying motivation in further education remains that human motives for choosing education pathways are complex and may not even be fully understood by the individual undertaking that pathway, as West (1996, p.5) stated:

The reasons for educational participation may be at the edge of consciousness, or at an unconscious rather than conscious level.

It is interesting to note that Legard et al (2001, p.i) in a qualitative evaluation of the EMA identified the difficulty of assessing the impact of the policy on post-compulsory student participation, because of the differentiated factors motivating decision making:

The personal motivation of young people electing to stay on in education or a work-based route varied. Where there was a strong motivation to follow a particular route, this was often highly influential in the final decision. Where motivation was passive in nature, the decision was more highly influenced by external influences. Young people who were unclear about which route to take sometimes stayed on in education by default. Where young people had clear career goals which could be realised either through further study or through work-based training, a range of different factors influence their final decision.

It appears doubtful that the EMA will increase student participation and achievement in post-compulsory education, because these are two types of behaviour that are influenced by many social, institutional, cultural, as well as, economic factors that result in social attitudes and motivation. The funding would have to change sixteen year olds' attitude to 'school' in order to make a difference and sociologists recognise that attitudes are incredibly hard to change (Parsons, 1951). Student retention may be improved by the EMA, because the financial reward may act as 'a bonus' for those students in further education who would have participated anyway. It is only changing student behaviour, not student attitudes.

Widening Participation

The European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 had been preceded by the Delors White Paper 'Growth, Competitiveness and Employment', which identified education, training and participation as essential for sustaining European competitiveness and 'economic and social well-being across the community' (Chisholm, 1997, p. 43). The concerns of Europe have been evident in British policy since the 1970s (Ecclestone, 2002). Stuart (1997, p.67) summarised the feeling of policy in the UK from the 1970s onwards as:

If we lack skills, we lose out. The economy, the performance of every business and the prosperity of every citizen suffer. We have no choice. We must invest in learning for the future.

Consequently education is now seen in policy terms as the most important route to social and economic prosperity (Ecclestone, 2002) and the cornerstone of workforce development (National Skills Taskforce, 2001). The widening participation agenda appears to support the perspective that successful education systems create successful economies, despite recent capitalist crises in Japan, Germany, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand (Ecclestone, 2002).

One of the aims of the Further Education Funding Council is to promote access to further education for people who do not participate in education and training, but who could benefit from it. (Kennedy, 1997, p.iii)

Kennedy (1997) realised that many young people were failing to continue into post-compulsory education, which would have a limiting effect on their future employment opportunities. In support of this Hutton (1996, pp. 190- 191) stated that:

Those without educational qualifications on low incomes and from unskilled families need training most. Yet it is precisely these workers who are least likely to receive training. The trouble is that for any teenager at sixteen who has no educational qualifications, it is perfectly rational to get a job – if he (or she) can – rather than forgo wages in order to train, because it is only by gaining an NVQ at Level 3 that total lifetime earnings start to exceed those of the unskilled worker – and even then the break-even age is not until thirty-five.

There may be strong positive returns for both the individual and society if *adequate* levels of education and training are met. Achieving one A Level, for example, results in higher lifetime earnings than would have occurred by spending the study period working (Hutton, 1996). Also, if individuals have a high level of education and training, then the skills on offer to society are high, productivity levels increase as the human capital stock improves which allows for rapid economic growth, lowered social security spending and consequently reimburses the government for increased education and training costs. It has been estimated that educational investment in post-compulsory education and training produces social returns as high as 20 or 30 per cent in the United Kingdom (Psacharopoulos and Layard, 1979), an excellent motivation for the government to support widening participation in post-compulsory education as part of the national economic agenda.

The widening participation committee (1994) was supported by a review of literature and research by the Policy Studies Institute (Herbert and Callender, 1997) and chaired by Helena Kennedy QC, who began her enquiry by attempting to define further education:

Further education refers to all further education provision whether in school sixth forms, further education and sixth form colleges, local education authority adult and community education services, voluntary and community organisations. It also includes some provision which is offered in the higher education sector, by employers and trade unions, or by independent training providers. (Kennedy, 1997, p.27)

The breadth of this definition resulted in the committee report (known as the Kennedy Report) concluding that:

Further education's reach is extensive. It has been at the heart of vocational training...It is the first choice for many young people at 16. Adult education classes have meant added enrichment for many" (Kennedy, 1997, p.1)

However, it was identified that further education was misunderstood as an educational provider, particularly among policy-makers. It was hoped that the report of the committee would inform the government about the vital role of further education for "...not only economic renewal but of social cohesion" (Kennedy, 1997, p.2). It was put forward that "Education must be at the heart of any inspired project for regeneration in Britain" (Kennedy, 1997, p.5), because encouraging participation in education increases people's access to 'social capital'⁴, a prerequisite for a cohesive society. As the Kennedy Report, (1997, p.7) stated:

Education strengthens the ties which bind people, takes the fear out of difference and encourages tolerance...It is the likeliest means of creating a modern, well-skilled workforce, reducing levels of crime, and creating participating citizens.

It could be suggested, therefore, that the Kennedy Report (1997) was not only advocating an increased participation for British citizens in further education, but consequentially an increased participation in society itself, demonstrating the national social and economic

⁴ Social capital is a term used to refer to the acceptance of morality, reciprocity, community and trust by individuals in society.

agenda behind the policy (Ecclestone, 2002). The report acknowledged the social inequalities that exist in British society and the need for great social cohesion, the structural approach adopted by the government (see Sociological Context section in this chapter) necessitates a positive change to those inequalities, such as improved financial support. The Kennedy Report recommended that a commitment to providing a “*quality promise to any learner that a suitable, supported route back into learning will be available*” (Kennedy, 1997, p.8), should be made by the government. It was realised that these routes would be many and varied, however the EMA was later established by the government as one of these supportive routes to increase participation in further education.

The ‘Agenda for Change’ put forward by the Kennedy Report identified several points, the following of which were seen as influential in supporting the introduction of a pilot EMA in 1999:

- Prioritise widening participation in the post-16 education agenda
- Reform financial support to students, including the benefits system in the interests of equity and promoting ‘Welfare to Work through Learning’ (Kennedy, 1997, pp.13-14)

It is interesting to note that only economic structural issues were identified by the report as routes for solving inequity for participation in further education. It is likely that the lack of evidence provided by further education institutions on those who do not participate and who fail to achieve (Kennedy, 1997 p.20) contributed to cultural concepts, such as labelling and prejudice, not being identified as barriers to learning and motivation and therefore forming no part of the ‘Agenda for Change’. The Kennedy Report did acknowledge that specific groups could be identified as being under-represented in colleges, but that participation by sex and ethnicity was changing and that more women than men participate in post-16 education and that some ethnic groups are represented in full-time post-16 education more often than their white peers (Kennedy, 1997, p.20). The acceptance of this positive change (established by the National Advisory Council for Education and Training in 1996) appears to have confirmed the widening participation committee’s support of a widening participation policy based on structural changes to the education system (Kennedy, 1997). The report states that using specific groups based on age, sex, race or ethnicity was ‘not suitable to identify under-represented groups for funding’ (Kennedy, 1997, p.61).

The International Experience

It is interesting to note that a structural approach had been adopted in relation to widening student participation in post-compulsory education in Australia, twelve years before the introduction of the pilot EMA in the UK, apparently with great success (Dearden and Heath, 1996). In 1987 the Australian government introduced 'AUSTUDY', which was a means-tested income support scheme for full-time Higher Education students and secondary school students in their last two years (equivalent to British secondary school Years 12 and 13 or 16 year old going into post-compulsory education). All payments were made direct to the student, a policy adopted in relation to the EMA. It was introduced to address rising youth unemployment and to improve participation rates in school and Higher Education (Dearden and Heath, 1996).

The difference between the situation in Australia and the UK was that at the same time as introducing AUSTUDY, the government substantially reduced income support for unemployed teenagers (Dearden and Heath, 1996). It could be argued that in Australia young people from low-income backgrounds who were not willing to participate in post-compulsory education experienced considerable economic deprivation, therefore the choice not to participate was removed. Consequently, it could be argued that it was not the financial incentive that increased the number of young people willing to stay on into further education: it was the lack of financial support associated with any other choice. Dearden and Heath (1996), using the Australian Longitudinal Survey and the Australian Youth Survey, examined the effects of AUSTUDY on retention rates in secondary schools and demonstrated that AUSTUDY had, not surprisingly, contributed to an increase in retention rates since 1987. In particular, it was identified that students from less wealthy backgrounds had increased retention rates of up to 4% between 1989 and 1993.

The AUSTUDY programme in Australia has significantly improved the probability of children from relatively poor backgrounds staying in school past the minimum leaving age. (Dearden and Heath, 1996, p.25)

Dearden and Heath (1996) posed the question of whether the UK could introduce an affordable AUSTUDY-type programme for secondary school students. They suggested that an 'education allowance' be created that took child benefit payments for 16-19 year

olds in full-time education away from the parents and instead was given direct to the student. They argued that this change in policy would not disadvantage those with low-incomes or on state benefits, but would 'increase full-time education participation'. Dearden and Heath (1996, p.28) supported the positive effects of AUSTUDY and argued that British education system would benefit from a similar policy, although they acknowledge that 'other factors continue to have important effects on secondary-school retention rates'.

It is interesting to note that Dearden and Heath's paper (1996) was published when the Kennedy Report (Kennedy, 1997) was being researched, but was never referenced in it. The similarities between the EMA and AUSTUDY in their structural solutions to post-compulsory education participation and retention rates, i.e. a means-tested student grant, payment to student, are noticeable. Also, the national economic agenda for introducing a policy of widening participation in Britain was similar to that of Australia. Both countries hoped that increased post-compulsory education participation and retention would equate with improved achievement levels and eventually a more qualified and competent workforce (Dearden and Heath, 1996; Kennedy, 1997). It is therefore surprising that Dearden and Heath's research did not appear to have any influence on the outcomes of the Kennedy Report (1997).

America has produced many studies on the relationship between student support and participation in further education (College Entrance Examination Board, 1983; 1990; Mortenson, 1990; Mumper and Vander Ark, 1991). However, it is important to note that the American further education system has differences, as well as similarities, to the system of further education in Britain and therefore cannot be used for comparative purposes. In the United States most students have to pay for further education, which means the institutions are run as businesses that have to attract and keep 'clients' (students). Therefore colleges want to know about the factors that could affect student participation and retention, in order to maintain or improve enrolment. This business/client relationship has been the one reason behind the large amount of American studies on student participation in Further and Higher Education (Herbert and Callender, 1997). In Britain, however the economic impetus for examining student participation and retention in

further education had not been present until relatively recently⁵, which accounts for the relative lack of studies in this area of educational research. British students have not been treated as ‘consumers’ of education, unlike their counterparts in America who have all the associated consumer rights and equality of opportunity. This could explain why student perceptions of financial support in further education and motivation to learn have not been examined until recently (Legard, et al., 2001), when the perceptions and experiences of students have been realised to impact on student participation and retention (Martinez, 1995).

Community Colleges in the United States are the most comparable institutions to British further education colleges and research has been conducted to examine enrolment behaviour of high school leavers (Herbert and Callender, 1997). Studies, such as those conducted by St John and Noell (1989), Leslie and Brinkman (1987), St John (1990) and Somers and St John (1993), have all argued that financial support has a positive effect on student enrolment in the United States, particularly among low-income families. Financial support that includes a contribution towards both maintenance and tuition fees is argued to have the most positive impact on student enrolment/participation (St John, 1990), although all types of financial aid have been shown to encourage college attendance in all groups of students (St John and Noell, 1989).

All types of econometric techniques have been used in the United States to study the impact of financial support on participation in Community Colleges and different models have been applied. Somers and St John (1993) used a model that assessed the impact of aid offers on 2,558 college students that had already accepted a college place. Again it was shown that financial support had a significant influence on enrolment. Leslie and Brinkman (1987) conducted a meta-analysis of 25 studies examining the relationship between tuition charges and enrolment and demonstrated that all of the studies found a link between student enrolment and tuition fee levels. It was argued that although all the studies were different, they all demonstrated that enrolment declined when tuition fees were increased and vice versa.

⁵ After incorporation in 1994, Further Education Colleges became financially more independent and aware of the relationship between student participation and retention and College income.

The extensive research on student enrolment (participation) and persistence (retention) that exists in the United States has been supported by established and wide reaching longitudinal datasets (Herbert and Callender, 1997), such as the research of Leslie and Brinkman (1987). This support has not been evident in Britain. There have been only two datasets for econometric modelling – the Youth Cohort Survey and the National Child Development Studies – neither of which explored the relationship between financial support and further education participation and retention (Callender and Herbert, 1997). Example studies and research findings from America can only be drawn on to stimulate debate for this case study and to offer direction for future research that may seek to establish longitudinal datasets that allow students to be tracked over time and examine changes in behaviour (participation, retention and achievement) in further education. It is interesting to note that the national evaluation of the EMA, commissioned by The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 1999, is based on a longitudinal sample dataset taken from further education institutions piloting the EMA (Ashworth et al., 2001; Maguire et al., 2001; Maguire et al., 2002); Ashworth et al., 2002). (see Chapter Five). It could be suggested that the rigorous, frequent, accessible, and often state funded, US research into financial student support and further education *has* acted as a model for British research into this area.

Financial Support for Students in the UK

Lifelong inclusive learning becomes meaningless rhetoric if money is not available to make such a grand project a reality. (Kennedy, 1997, p.9)

Two thirds of the post-16 education budget was spent by the government on Universities in 1996, even though only one quarter of the five million further education learners went on to Higher Education (Kennedy, 1997). This inequity in further education funding was acknowledged by the Kennedy Report, who again took a structural approach and identified the need for increased funding as a way of addressing social class inequalities in participation. It was identified that the top one fifth of households with the highest incomes received more in educational subsidies than the bottom two fifths (Kennedy, 1997), a situation which the report argued “demands an urgent reappraisal” (Kennedy, 1997, p.10). The Kennedy Report challenged the ‘gold card funding’ of full-time higher

education and demanded a redistribution of resources in favour of further education, including access funds, if widening participation was to be supported.

Financial and practical support for learners is crucial for widening participation. (Kennedy, 1997, p.65)

The Kennedy Report (1997) argued that many people from low income groups were the ones who need to be more engaged in learning as a way of improving the national economy, a belief supported by social commentators such as Hutton (1996). However, the lack of financial support for students in further education was seen by the Kennedy Report (1997) to be a factor in their poor participation and retention. The report called for the government to 'undertake a major review of financial support for further education students' (Kennedy, 1997, p.65), even though they found 'no comprehensive or reliable investigation in this country of the relationship between participation and student support in either further or higher education' (Kennedy, 1997, p.71). It was the anomalies of the system, rather than research, which justified their call for change in student support, anomalies that appeared to create barriers for learning.

Full-time students aged 16-19 in further education do not have to pay fees, but they do have the additional and indirect costs associated with a programme of study, such as transport, add-ons, foregone earnings (Herbert and Callender, 1997). No research exists quantifying the costs of participating in full-time further education (Herbert and Callender, 1997), but research on income and expenditure for an average student in full-time higher education living at home in 1995/6 was £506 per annum on course related items and £200 per annum on travel (Callender and Kempson, 1996). The additional costs for full-time further education students could be assumed to be very similar to this. Further education students, however, are less likely to be aware of these 'hidden extras' (Firth and Goffey, 1996), even though the cost of books and travel has risen (Mansell, 1997).

Despite increased costs associated with further education, students have not had access to the same kind of financial support as that offered to Higher Education students. Access funds have been available to students in need in further education, but these funds have been limited (20% of the total Access Fund budget) and based on different application procedures in different institutions. In 1995/6 only 1.5% of further education students

received access funds worth an average of £95, compared to 5% of Higher Education students at an average value of £358 (Herbert and Callender, 1997).

The Kennedy Report (1997) identified the confusion and uncertainty surrounding financial support for further education students, which they argued "...created significant barriers to entering and staying in learning for those in greatest need" (Kennedy, 1997, p.72). This statement is very important in that it was to become the focus of the government's reasoning behind the EMA. The suggestion that students are less likely to participate in further education and/or more likely to leave without completing their course because of the need for financial support resulted in the government supporting (DfEE, 1998a) a new system of financial support package for all 16-19 year olds entering a full-time further education course. In their response to the Kennedy Report (DfEE, 1998a), the government stated that they would:

Remove barriers to learning by introducing a new improved system of support for further education students to replace the system of Local Education Authority (LEA) discretionary awards. (DfEEa, 1998, p.5)

The LEA discretionary awards were made directly to individuals under Section 2 of the 1962 Education Act (Herbert and Callender, 1997). These awards were the main source of public funding for non-Higher Education students in post-16 education and were aimed at meeting the costs of participation. The way in which these awards were distributed was unfair, in that only a minority (5%) of further education students received them in 1994/5 (NEAGA, 1994; Herbert and Callender, 1997). It was also found that because the awards were directly funded from the LEA's budget (rather than a central government grant), economic factors locally could radically affect provision (Nash, 1994). Diamond (1996) reported that the LEAs have been able to make their own decisions on not only the number of awards given, but how much and to whom. As Herbert and Callender (1997, p.9) concluded that 'the system of discretionary awards has become a lottery'.

Equity and Achievement

In order to establish a more equitable system of funding for students (which would later result in the EMA), the government set up the further education Student Support Advisory

Group (DfEE, 1998b), chaired by Councillor Graham Lane, to advise Ministers⁶ on fairer and more effective arrangements to replace the LEA discretionary awards. The Lane Committee (as it became known) identified that the availability of financial support varied in different parts of the country; that expenditure on discretionary awards for further education had been falling dramatically and that there was a lack of clarity and consistency about entitlements to state benefits for students. The findings of the Lane Committee were based on a wide range of evidence, including LEAs, colleges and experts in the field, but still echoed those reported by Herbert and Callender in 1997. As a consequence of their data, the Lane Committee (DfEE, 1998b) made the following recommendations in relation to full-time 16 – 19 year old student financial support in further education:

- There should be national minimum entitlements for 16-19 year olds in schools and colleges for financial support to help meet the cost of transport and other living costs of education.
- There should be no financial barriers to study for 16 – 19 year olds from low income families. These students should be exempt from all tuition and examination fees. Students should not have to meet the cost of registration fees.
- Eligibility for FE-sector college Access Funds should be extended to include 16-18 year olds and all part-time students.
- The government should invite LEAs, schools with sixth forms, FE-sector colleges and others to work together in active partnerships to develop strategic plans for the delivery of these arrangements in their areas.
- The government should require LEAs to make effective arrangements for home to school/college transport and exhort the partnerships to work with local transport companies to secure best arrangements for students and best value for money.

The response of the government to the Lane Committee recommendations was supportive and, in a letter from Baroness Blackstone to Graham Lane (FEDA, 1999), indicated the intention of introducing the Education Maintenance Allowance as a form of financial support for full-time FE students aged 16 – 19 years old:

⁶ Information collected by the Advisory Group was used by Baroness Blackstone to establish the best way to target financial support to FE students most in need and how best to deliver the new arrangements.

We want to ensure that a new national system of student support is effective in widening participation and improving retention and achievement. The relationship between personal finance and education participation is not as simple as it may seem. We want to test out a number of assumptions and options on two cohorts of students, starting in 1999 and 2000. (FEDA, 1999, p. 5)

The “options” mentioned above refer to the different range of pilot EMAs that the government went on to introduce in 1999. The effectiveness of the EMAs would be examined through a national evaluation, an evaluation that would be used to establish whether the EMA should be introduced nationally through both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned a longitudinal evaluation of the piloting of EMAs. The evaluation is being undertaken by a consortium of research organisations, led by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) and also includes the National Centre for Social Research, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and the Institute for Employment Research (IER) (Ashworth et al., 2001; Ashworth et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2002; Legard et al., 2001; Knight and White, 2003; Heaver et al., 2002).

A DfES (CRSP/IFS) quantitative evaluation of the first two years of the EMA (1999-2001) (Ashworth et al., 2001) was a statistical analysis through a longitudinal cohort study of large random sample surveys of young people and their parents in 10 EMA pilot areas and eleven control areas. The evaluation found that there had been a 3.7 percentage point rise in post-16 participation among the whole Year 12 population. The EMA was estimated to have had a significant impact on student participation in urban areas, but failed to reach statistical significance in rural areas, however if the EMA was rolled out nationally the evaluation’s estimated effect on EMA eligible students is an increase of 5.9 per cent (Ashworth et al. 2001).

Ashworth et al. (2001) suggested that ‘money paid to the child is more effective both in increasing education participation in Year 12, and retention in Year 13’ (Ashworth et al., 2001, p. iii). Interestingly the report stated that the most effective way to increase retention was through increased retention payment bonuses. A DfES (CRSP/IER) qualitative evaluation by Maguire et al. (2002, p. viii) on the implementation of the EMA, also found

that 'it was widely acknowledged that the introduction of EMA has helped to improve student retention rates', as well as student participation.

A DfES (National Centre for Social Research) qualitative evaluation of the EMA (Legard et al., 2001) investigated the delivery and impact of the scheme in four fieldwork areas selected to reflect different variants of the EMA model (see Appendix I) using 101 in-depth interviews of EMA receiving and non-EMA receiving young people. The evaluation suggested that young people decide to participate in further education based on personal considerations, 'including personal motivation, and a number of external influences, such as the advice of parents or teachers' (Legard et al., 2001, p. i), although participants implied that there were financial barriers to them remaining in education. The evaluation also found that there had been a low awareness of the EMA amongst all young people during Year 11 offering little support for the EMA impacting on post-compulsory education participation, resulting in contradictory findings to those stated in Ashworth et al. (2001) and Maguire et al (2002):

...there was little evidence in the first year of EMA having influenced decisions about whether to participate in post-compulsory education. (Legard et al., 2001, p. iv)

Knight and White (2003) undertook a qualitative evaluation of the EMA for the DfES (National Centre for Social Research), interviewing 76 young people in 2000 who were either participating in the EMA for a second year, or had completed the course and left education, and 39 young people who had failed to complete a course. The suggested findings on the impact of the EMA on student participation are less positive than Ashworth et al. (2001) and Maguire et al. (2002), but more optimistic than Legard et al. (2001):

EMA had, in some cases, influenced the decision of young people in the early leavers sample to participate in post-compulsory education. (Knight and White, 2003, p. 9)

The effectiveness of the EMA in meeting its aims was suggested to be influenced by factors other than the student funding itself, such as student motivation in that 'young people primarily remained in education out of a commitment and desire to learn' (Knight and White, 2003, p. 81). and which supports the notion of cultural/social influences

impacting on student participation, retention and achievement identified earlier in this chapter.

It is interesting to note at this point that the primary data examined for this case study have not found any clear relationship between EMA financial support for full-time students on advanced courses in further education and increased levels of participation and achievement, although slight increases in retention have been seen that may or may not be attributable to the EMA (see Chapter Four). The government's decision to "test out a number of assumptions and options" (FEDA, 1999) offers a sensibly cautious route in attempting to improve student participation, retention and achievement through financial support. The sociological theory examined earlier in this chapter suggested that a structural approach to widening participation may not offer the most effective improvement to student participation and achievement in FE, a suggestion that appears to be supported by this case study and some findings from the national evaluation. Therefore, based on the literature examined and the research conducted for this case study, perhaps the long term outcomes for the EMA in relation to the national economic agenda should be questioned.

Preliminary national evaluation data influenced the government's decision in 2002 to introduce the EMA nationally in 2004 (DfES, 2002a). The DfES evaluation of the EMA offered some positive suggestions on student participation and retention for the first EMA cohort; however Heaver et al. (2002) question the reliability of the findings from the first year of the EMA pilot in Leeds and London (1999 to 2000), findings that impacted on the government's decision:

Given the partial coverage of EMA in 1999 in both Leeds and Inner London, and the limited take-up of EMA provision in Inner London, the statistical evidence presented about the impact of EMA on post-16 participation rates cannot be considered to be conclusive. In addition, comparisons of participation rates in EMA areas with those in the previous year cannot also be seen as providing conclusive evidence of an EMA effect. Other factors might have intervened which cannot be measured by the analysis. (Heaver et al., 2002, p. i-ii)

This suggests that the government may have been a little hasty in announcing the introduction of a national EMA *before* the DfES commissioned longitudinal survey of

EMA effectiveness had been completed and statements on the EMA's relationship to achievement made. It is interesting to note that to this effect the conclusions drawn from this case study after one year of examination were demonstrating positive outcomes of the EMA in relation to student participation (see chapter 4), outcomes that, at the end of the study, were not sustained.

Government support for widening participation in further education continues, based on the continued need for rapid economic growth. In a statement to the Association of Colleges (2000), the then Secretary of State for Education emphasised the need to ensure '*increased participation and achievement on broad and balanced programmes of study*', amongst 16–19 year olds (DfES, 2001a). By the academic year 1999/2000 615,600⁷ students under the age of 19 were enrolled on full-time (74%) or part-time (26%) courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council. Amongst 16–18 year olds, 75.4% were engaged in further education or training at the end of 1999, an increase of seven per cent from 1997 (DfES, 2001b). These trends appear to suggest that participation is already increasing amongst the Secretary of State's target group. However, the figures also indicate that the proportion of 16–18 year olds not in education or training (24%) has hardly changed since 1998, suggesting that the introduction of pilot EMAs in 1999 had not made a noticeable difference to participation rates.

The retention rate is based on the number of students completing their qualification, divided by the number of students who started the qualification excluding transfers (LSC, 1998). Retention rates used by the LSC for benchmarking data are based on results for two teaching years (LSC, 1998). This is interesting to note as this case study was designed to utilise the retention results for two teaching years of two cohorts. In 2000/01 the LSC recorded a college median retention rate of 88% for full-time students, which demonstrated an increase of one percentage point over the rates recorded in 1999/2000 and 1998/99 (LSC, 2002). The figures presented by the LSC suggest a much lower increase in further education student retention than those provided by the EMA national evaluation (Ashworth et al., 2001)

⁷ DfES Statistical First Release SFR30/2001 (DfES 2001c).

The achievement rate is calculated by comparing the number of students achieving a qualification with the total number completing courses that are intended to lead to a qualification (LSC, 1998). In 1994/95 the Further Education Funding Council produced data that placed the overall estimated achievement rate at 65% in England (Kennedy, 1997). Comparable data are not available to examine whether this level has changed over time. However, it can be noted that achievement levels were seen by the FEFC to vary by type and level of qualification, type of course, type of college and age (Kennedy, 1997). However, as a factor influencing achievement, student finance or financial support was not mentioned. In 2000/01 the LSC (2002) recorded that achievement rates had increased over the past three years with a median rate of 74% for FE and tertiary colleges demonstrating a seven percentage point rise from 1998/9. These figures are interesting since they show a positive change in student achievement since the introduction of the EMA.

One of the aims of the EMA is to allow students to achieve their qualification aim through the removal of any potential financial constraints. In South West College there was no significant difference between the achievement levels of the non-EMA cohort and the EMA cohort (see chapter 6), suggesting that other variables acting upon full-time post-16 students on advanced level courses may need to be changed in order to positively affect achievement rates. Alongside this, a study by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), Morris, (2002) reported that financial support in post-16 education was still lacking the equity requested by the Lane Committee (DfEE, 1998), remaining the ‘funding lottery’ that Callender and Herbert (1997) had identified for change several years before.

National sources of funding, which are locally delegated, are available to assist post-16 students in continuing in their education post-16. However, the different local and institutional approaches to the allocation of funds, albeit within DfES guidelines, have meant that there was often a perception of a lack of equity in the way in which financial support was made available for individual students...The emerging inequalities were further exacerbated by the introduction of EMAs, whereby eligibility for financial support is based on where a student resides. (Morris, 2002, p. 48.)

Improving Retention

The Widening Participation Committee Report (Kennedy, 1997) acknowledged the importance of retention (staying on a course until it has been completed) in relation to student funding in further education. Martinez (1995) suggested that the profile of retention had been raised by the following concerns:

1. The quality, effectiveness and accountability of the further education sector since incorporation.
2. The financial costs of non-completion for the colleges.
3. The financial, social and personal costs to students of non-completion.

Within the space of five years, we have therefore seen something of a revolution in perspectives of non-completion. From a position of relative unimportance, issues around student retention have come to attract national prominence and have been built into the funding and inspection frameworks. (Martinez, 1995, p. 3)

These factors, alongside external government pressure, have made post-compulsory education providers more aware of retention issues.

The limited amount of British studies available on student retention at the time of the Kennedy Report (1997) (Martinez, 1995) was based on the views of non-completers only and therefore their conclusions are limited (Herbert and Callender, 1997) and cannot be used to identify which variable would have the greatest effect for retention. In the United States, studies demonstrated that students from low-income families were less likely to complete college courses than those from wealthy backgrounds (Mumper and Vander Ark, 1991; Carroll, 1989). However, this does not mean that financial support during a college course has a direct effect on completion/retention. It was shown that once other variables were controlled, the impact of income on student retention was less pronounced (Velez, 1985).

Structural factors, such as low-income, have been identified as only one possible variable affecting student retention in further education. Many other reasons for non-completion have been put forward as possible explanations for low retention rates among post-compulsory students. Participation in the labour market (Sharp, 1996), experiences of teaching and learning (Medway and Penney, 1994), the induction process (Martinez,

1995). coursing⁸ (Medway and Penney, 1994), student support (Page, 1996), family problems (Medway and Penney, 1994) and course concerns (Smith and Bailey, 1993) have all been identified as factors that affect, to some degree, student retention in further education. This suggests that a structural approach (as outlined in the 'Sociological Context' section of this chapter) to improving retention rates could only offer a limited amount of change, because organisational, situational and cultural factors also have an impact on retention rates.

Smith and Bailey (1993) studied over 2,000 Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) students on full-time and part-time courses and found that only 5% of full-time students cited financial reasons for non-completion. Medway and Penney (1994) in a study of over 100 college students on the Isle of Wight found that organisational and course factors were identified three and half times more than financial factors as a reason for non-completion. Davies (1999) presented a paper at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) that examined the relationship between retention in further education and student finances and college quality, he concluded that:

...an enhancement (of) student finance would have less impact on raising rates of student retention and achievement than the adoption of strategies to improve academic quality, throughout a student's experience at college from induction to progression...Although financial difficulties are a common trigger of student drop-out, in general, withdrawal appears to result in cases where students have doubts that they are on the right course, are concerned about the quality of teaching and are unhappy about the support they are receiving for progression. (Davies, 1999, p.10)

Martinez's (1996) review of four further education colleges that attempted to improve retention concluded that changes in organisation factors resulted in success.

The successful strategies all embody college transformation. Starting with a number of different ways of formulating issues and with a number of more or less broadly defined strategies, all of South West Colleges have ended up addressing issues of cultural change, staff and student expectations and basic taken-for-granted assumptions about college mission and purpose. (Martinez, 1996, p.37)

⁸ Coursing refers to the matching of the student to the course taken.

Widening participation in FE was recommended to the Labour government (Kennedy, 1997, Herbert and Callender, 1997, DfEE, 1998b) and became manifest through the EMA in 1999. Government policy on the funding of students in further education (the EMA) appears to challenge previous Conservative ideologies on education and training, in that the national economic agenda realised that the cost of funding post-compulsory education for students from low-income backgrounds should eventually be self-financing based on the potential economic returns of a skilled workforce (Kennedy, 1997; DfES, 2002a). Labour also appears to offer social justice (DfES, 2002a) through improved access to, and support for successful completion of, further education courses for the low income groups in society.

The following Chapter reviews the history of educational research to locate the research methodology applied in this case study. The emergence of educational research from both the natural and the social sciences are examined through an historical overview and the impact of both positivism and interpretivism. Ethical and practical issues affecting educational research are considered. The link between research, theory and practice in education is debated.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Empirical educational research was established in the nineteenth century, inspired by the development of the natural sciences to examine fundamental education problems, problems that are still being researched today (De Landsheere, 1993). For example, in 1864 Fisher proposed that students be rated by ability in all major subjects at school and suggested the use of mean averaging to index achievement. By the late Nineteenth Century, drawing on the methods of the natural sciences, Schuyten opened a pedagogical laboratory in Antwerp in 1899 to study, experimentally, educational issues such as group teaching methods. However, it should be noted that at the same time as the natural scientific method was being advocated as the way forward for educational research, Lay (1903) emphasised the use of *both* quantitative *and* qualitative research methods, demonstrating the impact of the evolving social sciences on educational research. It could be argued, therefore, that research in education has emerged from both the natural and social sciences.

In more contemporary education research history a debate developed between sociologists about the value of data collected by different research methods. In the 1960s and 1970s positivist⁹ researchers supported more scientific methods and argued that their work was more objective and reliable than interpretive techniques (Cohen et al., 2000). Anti-positivists or interpretivists¹⁰ advocated more phenomenological research methods, claiming that the validity of their work made it more useful than the constructed categories of the positivists (Cohen et al., 2000). The cultural crisis that affected most highly industrialised societies in the late 1960s impacted on educational research through the challenging of scientific epistemology (Kirby et al., 2000). There was a reaction against the traditional positivist emphasis on quantitative methods and instead the importance of alternative methods of inquiry were stressed (Campbell, 1974). Britain therefore saw the development of a tradition of qualitative research in education. The beginnings of this tradition can be seen in the ethnographic approach of Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970), both of whom focused on the effects of streaming on the achievement and motivation of

⁹ Positivists argue that the social world is made up of 'facts', which can be studied like the natural world. Positivism favours the application of scientific method to all research in order to achieve objective generalisations about the causes of social behaviour.

¹⁰ Interpretivists argue that the social world is very different to the natural world. Interpretivism favours research methods that reveal the subjective experience of those being studied, while accepting that the researcher is part of the experience and can therefore never be truly objective.

pupils (Hammersley, *et al.*, 1994, p. 11). Qualitative approaches developed throughout the 1970s, especially in the areas of the sociology of education and in curriculum evaluation.

The 'new sociologists of education' noted that the positivistic, quantitative approach to educational research took too much for granted and failed to ask deep enough questions. They 'sought to place the question of who defines what constitutes education on the research agenda' (Hammersley *et al.*, 1994, p. 12). Research into curriculum evaluation saw similar developments, and quantitative approaches were seen as focusing solely on measurable outcomes while ignoring the processes that led to these outcomes.

Current research practices in education maintain the range of methods established in the 1970s. The type of method adopted by the researcher is usually linked to their theoretical background. For example, an educational researcher from a scientific Psychology background may be more likely to adopt the methods established by the natural sciences in order to 'test' educational phenomena. This link between theory and method is crucial in understanding the reasons for adopting a particular methodological approach. In fact, the methodology applied to this study can be placed within the researcher's Sociological background. Consequently, the emergent methodology is located within the qualitative research tradition.

There is a growing tendency among some qualitative researchers in education to reject entirely the notion of objectivity on the basis that there can be no 'objective reality' which is independent of the epistemological presuppositions of the observer. Eisner (1991) criticises the notion of an 'ontological reality' which he sees as underlying much educational research. He also questions the proposition that researchers can adopt a kind of 'procedural objectivity' that will eliminate subjective bias. He suggests that all knowledge is framework-dependent, and that we can have no direct knowledge of a 'world-out-there'. We can, however, acquire knowledge which is more or less sound as long as we remember that 'what we regard as true depends upon shared frameworks of perception and understanding' (Hammersley, *et al.*, 1994, p. 14). Phillips (1992) also argues that the absence of a body of knowledge or data whose validity is absolutely certain does not prevent us from making reasonable assessments of competing claims.

These perspectives on the possibility and nature of 'objective' truth characterise the approach to validity adopted in the present study. The choice of methodology has been driven by a desire to avoid the extremes of positivistic approaches to research on the one hand and 'research as story-telling' on the other.

Political, theoretical and ethical considerations have also influenced the choice of methodology for this case study. Positivistic approaches to educational research have been criticised on the grounds that they tended to 'preserve the political status quo, rather than challenging it' (Hammersley, *et al.*, 1994, p. 15). The use of positivistic approaches implied that education was politically neutral and that its value was accepted uncritically (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Issues of the extent to which education was pressed into service to support social inequalities and dominant political agendas were not addressed.

In the field of educational evaluation (in which the present study can be located), qualitative researchers rejected the hierarchical relationship in which participants (teachers) took an inferior position to the researcher (evaluator). MacDonald (1977, p.226)) developed a 'political classification' of evaluation studies, which he separated into three types:

- Bureaucratic evaluation, which is explicitly intended to serve the needs of government agencies by helping them to achieve their policy objectives;
- Autocratic evaluation, which offers external validation of a policy to government agencies responsible for funding education;
- Democratic evaluation, which is characterised as 'an information service to the community'.

The present study relates to the last of these models, in that it attempts to illuminate the effectiveness of the EMA at South West College to a local and national audience: ensure easily accessible data collection techniques and participant confidentiality:

The key concepts of democratic evaluation are 'confidentiality', 'negotiation' and 'accessibility'. (MacDonald, 1977, pp. 227: cited in Hammersley *et al.*, 1994, p. 18).

This study employs a case study method, based on the use of a discussion group, comment sheets, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, supplemented by documentary analysis. Attempts have been made to maintain methodological and analytical rigour within a qualitative evaluation. Some feminist research principles have been acknowledged. Feminist research suggests that the researcher listens to the respondent, rather than imposing frameworks upon them. This principle was operationalised through the initial discussion group and tutor comment sheet, enabling close links with the notions of reflexivity and grounded theory. The researcher hoped that by listening to the students' and tutors' ideas, attitudes and beliefs at the beginning of the case study, it would enable a more 'true to life' interpretation of the findings to be constructed. By utilising this approach in the discussion group and comment sheet, it was hoped that any themes generated by further data collection techniques using more constructed frameworks (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) would have some validity.

There is always a potential for bias in educational research. Drever (1995) has noted that 'Bias becomes an issue if you ask people to volunteer to be interviewed' (p. 37), and there is the danger that interviewees may hold an entrenched position in respect of the research question. Bell (1993) has noted that there is potential for bias on the part of the interviewer as well, largely because researchers are human beings and not machines. She suggests that 'It is easier to acknowledge the fact that bias can creep in than to eliminate it altogether' (p. 95), and recommends that constant self-control and awareness can help.

Educationalists should consider the effects of their research on the people being studied before they start. The aim of educational research may be to get a better understanding of, or some further knowledge of, 'education' (Bassegy, 1990), but not at the cost of negatively affecting those being studied. This would be seen as immoral. This balance between the demands of the empirical research and the rights of the research subject is known as the 'costs/benefits ratio' (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). It is an ethical dilemma that has to be addressed, 'as far as it is possible to do so' (Cohen, et al., 2000), but remains a subjective consideration.

Ethical concerns encountered in educational research in particular can be extremely complex and subtle and can frequently place

researchers in moral predicaments which may appear quite irresolvable. (Cohen, et al., 2000, p. 49)

Ethical issues in educational research may arise from the type of problems and issues that are examined. For example, ethical considerations may occur from the nature of the educational research project (sensitive educational issue, such as differences in achievement by sex), the context of the research (where the research takes place, such as a prison school), the process being applied (how it affects the subject, such as causing localised stress), research methods employed (inherent ethical considerations, such as participant observation), type of participant/subject (such as adults with basic skills needs), type of data being collected (sensitivity of the information, such as student home backgrounds) and the final outcome for the data (the place where it is to be published, such as a national newspaper that could embarrass the school) (Kirby et al, 2000).

Whatever the educational research being conducted, it should have 'an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for quality of educational research' (BERA, 1993, p.1). These ethical guidelines create a responsibility to the research profession, the participants, the public and any funding agencies (BERA, 1992). In conducting the research for this case study, the BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 1992) were fully considered. Protocol was observed, in that all the relevant authorities (Principal and Director of Studies at South West College) gave their permission and approval and access to the institution was granted. All the participants gave their informed consent¹¹ to take part in the research, including the opportunity sample for the semi-structured interviews. The aims, purposes, likely publication and possible consequences for participants were stated at the beginning of the discussion group, tutor comment sheet, questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Participants were also told that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher was honest and open in her relationship with participants and institutional representatives, answering all questions posed. The anonymity¹² of the participants was maintained in the final report. Fabrication,

¹¹ Informed consent refers to participants in research being given all the facts about their participation in the research in order to make the decision on whether to take part in the research.

¹² Participants have the right to remain anonymous, which should be respected when no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Participants should, however, be made aware that anonymity cannot be achieved in certain situations (BERA, 1992).

falsification and misrepresentation of findings was avoided through the methodology applied, allowing the research be reported accurately.

The aim of the study is to investigate the effect of the EMA on participation, retention and achievement for young people from low-income households on full-time advanced level academic (Advanced Level GCE) and vocational (Advanced Level GNVQ) courses at South West College. The issues will be examined in terms of the perceptions of students claiming the EMA, tutors administrating the EMA and a manager overseeing the EMA. Crude statistical data will also be used to compare pre-EMA and post-EMA student success within South West College. In the case study all the research methods used were intended to illuminate my understanding of the EMA. Data collection, analysis and implementation will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Data Collection and Analysis

Realising that the research methods employed would be crucial to the success of the study, a suitable mechanism was developed for examining the identified area of research.

Thorough background knowledge of existing literature in the area was established and a review of new developments in research methodology conducted. Based on the material examined it was decided that a case study approach, utilising discussion groups, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and statistical data of South West College would be the most appropriate research methods to employ. This use of different research methods has also been referred to as 'data triangulation' (Arskey and Knight, 1999, p. 23):

(data triangulation means)...the use of a research design involving diverse data sources to explore the same phenomenon. The data sources can be varied, or triangulated, in terms of person, time or space. So, for example, data might be collected from comparison groups, or at different points in time, or from a range of settings.

Such triangulation should help to increase confidence in the results of the study, however it should be noted that it can make research more time consuming, expensive and complex. In relation to this case study, the cost and time had been considered before embarking on the research and did not present a problem. The complexity of using data triangulation became evident during the analysis of the findings. The multiple sources of data opened up the findings; however it made it more difficult to interpret the findings as

different sources illuminated different insights. The case study demonstrated that the effectiveness of the EMA depended on the data being examined, in that the students perceived the EMA to be more successful than the college data were able to support. This is interesting as it also suggests that, based on the complexity of student motivation to participate in FE and succeed, the national evaluation of the EMA pilot may produce different findings for the different data examined.

Case studies employ interpretivist principles to examine an individual, a group or a social institution in detail to elicit valid information, as Howe (1994, p.68) elucidates:

A case study is an in-depth examination, often through direct primary data-gathering methods such as participant observation, of a particular institution or (in the guise of the life document) of an individual.

This method has been challenged for not being representative of a population; however this approach has never claimed to be representative or generalisable. Case studies can provide valuable insight and accurate representation of a specific social phenomenon and/or institution (Walker, 1993), such as the effect of the EMA on student participation, retention and achievement at a further education College in the South West of England. Therefore the advantages of using this approach are that it could act as the basis for a larger study, giving the researcher ideas about areas to investigate further, or it could highlight a broad typicality to similar social areas.

Preliminary Data Collection and Analysis

Discussion Group

A discussion group was used as an initial data collection method to inform the researcher about issues surrounding the EMA that were important to the students. It was hoped that the information collected would present a more valid set of ideas related to participation, retention and achievement and the EMA than would have been constructed by the researcher without listening to the students (Walker, 1993). This data collection technique was adopted based on feminist research principles, which encourage the researcher to listen to the respondents' ideas, attitudes and beliefs and utilise these reflexively (Oakley, 1981; McRobbie, 1982; Stanley, 1990) and the principles of grounded theory. It was hoped that the discussion group would allow for maximum reflexivity, opening up the analysis

through the generation of themes from the ground up, themes that would support the case study as it 'closed in' on other more structured data collection techniques.

Grounded theory is an inductive qualitative research method that seeks to understand human behaviour by collecting real-world observation and analysing the dominant process in the social scene under investigation with the ultimate goal of developing theories (Polit and Hungler, 1997; Gillis and Jackson, 2002). In essence, grounded theory refers to building a new theory from the ground up by focusing on specific aspects of practice with the intention of building a larger perspective. It is particularly useful in areas where little research has been conducted (Gillis and Jackson, 2002), such as this case study, because sensitising questions are used to learn what is relevant in the situation under study and the data collected are used to develop rich, dense and analytical frameworks (Fitzpatrick, 1998). Data collection and analysis go on hand in hand.

The discussion group acted as '*the preliminary and primary stage of analysis*' (Hammersley et al, 1994) and was the only approach to engage grounded theory. Common features in the transcript were identified resulting in notes on important points, suggestions, relationships and categories and consequently the recognition of emerging themes and possible patterns. At this stage, the researcher was studying the data and seeking clues to identify categories, themes, issues and key words that could be used for the pilot student questionnaire. The data collected from the discussion group resulted in the formation of categories and concepts used in all of the questionnaires and interview schedules (Hammersley, *et al.*, 1994). Preliminary and primary analysis began tentatively and speculatively, but ideas did begin to emerge and take shape as data collection and analysis proceeded.

These first steps in qualitative analysis helped to indicate the direction of further enquiries. The data collected from the discussion group was used to construct the pilot student questionnaire and could be seen as, what Hammersley et al (1994) have termed, '*category and concept formation*'. Category and concept formation involves organising the data in a systematic way. Data were organised in an exhaustive, integrated, succinct and logical way, through the identification of major categories behind which the data were marshalled. In the context of the present study, the categories established a set of questions that

examined the participants' perceptions on a range of issues related to the research questions. As Hammersley *et al.*, 1994, p.77, noted:

The test of the appropriateness of such a scheme is to see whether most of the material can be firmly accommodated within one of the categories and, as far as is possible, within one category alone.

The discussion group was easy to administer and provided ample material from which to construct the pilot questionnaire. However, the volume of material recorded during the discussion did result in the transcripts taking a long time to annotate. This was considered prior to embarking on the discussion group and was thought worthwhile in the quest for more validity in the questionnaire question construction.

Subsequent Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires and Comment Sheets

Questionnaire content was based on an analysis of the information collected from the discussion group, demonstrating the reflexive nature of the research process for the case study, and the aims of the case study. Both open-ended and closed questions were used in the questionnaires and coding was applied to the closed-questions (see Appendix Ci), which enabled the responses to be analysed thematically. The student responses to the open-ended questions were also analysed and located within themes. This resulted in some generalisations about student views and attitudes within the college being represented.

The questionnaires were worded clearly and unambiguously to aid maximum respondent participation. This aim was supported by the construction of a pilot questionnaire that was issued to a single tutor group (with instructions to complete and comment on the questionnaire), allowing problems to be rectified and amended for distribution to the whole student cohort of the case study. It was decided that the most appropriate and cost effective method of distributing the questionnaires to the student cohort would be 'by post' (see section on Design Implementation). A tutor 'comment sheet' (see Appendix D) was distributed with the Year One questionnaire. Tutors were asked to 'comment' on the EMA without any other direction from the researcher. It was hoped that the data collected by this technique would allow tutor perceptions to emerge freely. The researcher waited for all

questionnaires and comment sheets to be returned before embarking on any analysis; however limited time made it necessary to record responses as soon as they appeared.

Hammersley, *et al.* (1994) noted that analysis often occurs '*at the same time and in conjunction with data collection*' (p. 72). They suggested that it may be inadvisable to continue to collect data "*without examining it from time to time to see if any major themes, issues or categories are emerging... (which) will then direct future data collection in the process known as 'progressive focusing'*" (p. 72). This approach was utilised throughout the case study as themes emerged from the different data collection tools employed.

To this effect the researcher prepared a summary sheet using a computer aided statistical analysis package for the social sciences (SPSS) on which to record questionnaire responses for all respondents. Coding made this process easier, because the codes of each response replaced the actual response, allowing for ease of analysis. However, the open-ended question responses and tutor comments were subjected to theme analysis for the reasons put forward by Hammersley *et al.* (1994, p.134):

...the aim is to develop a set of categories relevant to the focus of the research on the basis of careful scrutiny of the data. Once this has been done, further data are then coded and allocated to the categories. This produces a set of themes or features, each of which can be illustrated by data extracts. (p. 134).

There are many reasons for choosing to use questionnaires, such as the collection of more representative data from a large population, or the fact that they are cheap to produce; and as many reasons against choosing them, such as the potentially low response rate or the fact that those who respond to a questionnaire maybe different to those who do not (questioning representativeness). It was believed at the beginning of this case study that questionnaires would generate responses that could be generalised for the advanced level student population in South West College in Year One and Two of the 1999 – 2001 cohort. It was hoped that issues of representativeness, response rate, answering honestly and researcher imposition of value had all been fully considered and minimalised in the course of the questionnaire process.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The case study also employed semi-structured interviews. The research questions were asked, themes from the discussion group were considered, questions were devised (adopting a semi-structured approach), a schedule (list of questions) prepared and piloted and tools for analysis were considered.

There are three types of interview available to the researcher; structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. The researcher hoped to choose the type most appropriate to the research, bearing in mind the strengths and weaknesses of each method. Structured interviews are formal and usually based on a questionnaire, where the interviewer reads the questions and fills in the respondents' answers. It is a quantitative technique designed to produce statistical data. Structured interviews tend to be the least time consuming of all the interview techniques, with the researcher having a good idea of how long the interview will last. However, based on full consideration of the data that would be produced and the time commitment involved, the researcher decided that a structured interview approach would not support the desired qualitative evaluation and would have taken too long to conduct.

Semi-structured interviews are a semi-formal interview, usually based on pre-defined questions, but allowing the interviewer to deviate from the schedule to ask further relevant questions as appropriate.

With semi-structured interviews, the researcher establishes the general structure of the interview – based on the research question(s) – and allows the interviewee to respond in their own words. Prompts and probes can be used to allow respondents to elaborate on or clarify their answers. (Drever, 1995, p.1)

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to:

...follow up ideas, probe responses and ask for clarification or further elaboration. For their part, informants can answer questions in terms of what they see as important; Likewise, there is scope for them to choose what to say about a particular topic, and how much. (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.7)

Interviews allow the researcher to delve into the perceptions of respondents, what they claim to think or feel (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The interview method was thus deliberately chosen as best fitted for the purposes of the present study.

When people agree to be interviewed 'on the record', there is inevitably a 'power-differential' in the sense that the researcher has established the right to ask questions and to control the direction of the interview. This may be justified, however, to the extent that the process is intended to shed light on the specific research question(s): totally unstructured interviews can yield masses of irrelevant data.

Typically, the interview schedule for a semi-structured interview begins with a preamble which reminds the respondent of what they have agreed to do. The preamble also allows you to establish a 'common frame of reference' which may help respondents to understand your questions in the way you intend (Drever, 1995, p. 26). This is followed by a series of key questions relating to the aim(s) of the research, and a final 'sweeper' question which allows the respondent to add anything they wish to the record.

Semi-structured interviews can vary in length, but are not usually as long as unstructured interviews. It was decided that semi-structured interviews were most appropriate for this case study, allowing an interview schedule that was based on standard questions that could be changed or clarified if appropriate (see Appendix E). It was hoped that this open-ended type of semi-structured interview would increase the researcher's understanding of the respondent's answers, perceptions and beliefs, because this method can be very effective in gathering information on respondents' circumstances, preferences and opinions, and to 'explore in some depth their experiences, motivation and reasoning' (Drever, 1995).

The use of semi-structured interviews should allow the researcher to provide both detailed accounts of experiences and possibly generalisable themes on common occurrences, such as frequency of positive statements in relation to participation, retention and achievement and the EMA. By using this data collection tool it was hoped to describe what the EMA meant to respondents within the case study, as well as supporting these views with emerging themes to identify patterns in responses.

Unstructured interviews are informal interviews, usually based around a few pertinent questions relating to what the researcher wants to find out. The interviewer may deviate totally from the interview schedule should any interesting data emerge. It is a qualitative technique designed to produce in-depth information. Unstructured interviews are a useful tool when embarking on research in an unknown area, because the respondent can provide detailed information, which the researcher can apply to more structured/quantitative data collection techniques, thereby producing more valid data. This is generally the most time consuming interview technique. Consideration of time constraints and data collected by the discussion group resulted in this method not being adopted with the case study.

Unless an interview is very structured, it is very difficult for the researcher to write down responses during an interview. Handling an interview takes skill, particularly if the interviewer is expected to 'pick up' on areas of interest and develop more probing questions in that direction. Writing notes may also distract the interviewee, making them less relaxed and therefore less able to reveal their 'truth'. Video tape recordings would have offered an alternative and display, not only gestures and tone, but also body language, thereby providing more information for the interview. However, it should be remembered that the presence of a video camera could have caused the interviewee to change their behaviour (Hawthorne Effect). Consequently, the researcher decided to tape record the semi-structured interviews, which were later transcribed. Transcribed tapes can have their problems, in that the researcher had to make sure that what was said in an interview had the same meaning on paper. This was sometimes hard to do, because the tone of voice or pauses altered the meaning of the written word. However, the researcher feels confident that the meaning implied was as closely reflected as possible in the meaning given to the data collected, because (following the reflexive ethos of the methodology) respondents were asked to check the transcripts before analysis.

Documentary Evidence

Documentary evidence was also utilised in the case study. Data had been collected by South West College on student participation, retention and achievement as part of college policy on monitoring and evaluating performance and for the DfEE/DfES in response to the recommendations established by the Kennedy Report (1997) and Lane Committee (1998) (see Chapter Two). The way in which the data were recorded had changed over the

period being researched (1997 – 2001), however with full support of the College in access to data, the researcher was able to examine how the data were collected and presented and present each student cohort's data (1997 – 1999 and 1999 – 2001 – see sample selection) in the same way. By doing this a comparison between the figures on participation, retention and achievement between the two cohorts could tentatively be made, accepting that the complex number of variables that affect student participation, retention and performance can never truly be recognised in a crude analysis such as this.

It was hoped that the data for the 1997 student cohort would act as a base line in relation to participation, retention and achievement for students not receiving the EMA, as the EMA did not become available until 1999. This information would be compared to the data collected on participation, retention and achievement for the 1999 student cohort, who were the first group of students in full-time further education to be offered the EMA dependent on parental income. It should be noted that only advanced level students on vocation and academic courses would constitute the student cohort for the case study, based on the desire to investigate the effectiveness of the EMA over a two year period¹³ (the duration of advanced level courses). The students in both cohorts were similar in all other variables except the receipt of the EMA. The results of this comparison, although crude, should offer an impression on whether the EMA had had any effect on student participation, retention and achievement in South West College. Any impression could then be followed up by further research in this area that utilises more complex statistical analysis, such as multi level modelling, that can account for the impact of other variables on student participation, retention and achievement in further education.

Table A: Case Study Data Collection Technique by Year and Number of Respondents

¹³ Two years would allow for students to reflect on the EMA in operation in Year One and Year Two of their course, enabling the researcher to examine differences and similarities in perceptions between the years.

	Discussion Group	Questionnaire	Comment Sheet	Semi-Structured Interview	College Data (Advanced Level Students Number)
Non-EMA Student Cohort 1997	0	0	0	0	905
Non-EMA Student Cohort 1998	0	0	0	0	703
EMA Student Cohort 1999 (Year 1)	32	583	0	43	902
EMA Student Cohort 2000 (Year 2)	0	363	0	0	737
Tutors	0	0	24	11	0
Director of Studies	0	0	0	1	0

Sample Selection

Participants for the research process were chosen in the light of the research questions and the kind of information needed to satisfy the aims of the study. The participants fell into two sample frames; students on full-time advanced level vocational and academic courses enrolling in the college in either 1997 (the EMA was not available to these students who will represent a non-EMA cohort) or 1999 (the EMA was available to these students who will represent an EMA cohort) and staff, either tutors of full-time advanced level course students or staff with some form of responsibility for the EMA. All respondents were able to make meaningful contributions to the research based on primary experience of the case study topic being investigated.

The 1997 student cohort was examined as a whole population through college statistical data only. The 1999 student cohort was also examined as a whole population through college statistical data to enable a comparison of recorded levels of participation, retention

and achievement for non-EMA recipients and EMA recipients. However, the 1999 student cohort was also surveyed as population through questionnaires over two years to examine potentially changing attitudes and beliefs about the 'new' EMA. In this way it could be argued, as Kerlinger (1986, p. 349) stated, that 'the survey of the population was self-selecting'.

The 1999 student cohort also provided two sample groups, which I shall call 'the discussion group' and 'the interview group'. The discussion group was a representative¹⁴ random sample of full-time students on advanced level courses in receipt of the EMA within the college. 538 students at South West College were claiming EMA, the sample number was 50 (for reasons of space management and discussion viability), 32 responded (64% response rate) to form the sample group. This sampling method was initially chosen because everybody in the population has an equal chance of selection. The whole student population was divided by the following relevant factors; year of college enrolment (1999), claiming EMA and type of course (vocational and academic advanced level course), resulting in the discussion group sample of full-time students claiming EMA enrolled from 1999 in both vocational and academic advanced level courses being selected at random by drawing names from a hat. The advantage of this method of sampling is that it is considered more reliable than other sampling methods, because of how it represents the population under study. The use of snowball/volunteer sampling was dismissed through potential lack of representativeness. However, stratified random sampling can be expensive and time consuming to operationalise. This practical constraint was seen as insignificant in consideration of the benefits that may be achieved by having as representative a sample of 'views' established for the discussion group (and therefore a more valid basis for the whole case study). Using this sampling technique within a qualitative case study allowed rigorous and systematic enquiry (as discussed previously in the chapter) to illuminate the findings.

The interview group was initially intended to be a random sample of the full-time students on advanced level academic and vocational courses; however the response rate to the

¹⁴ If a sample contains the typical characteristics in the same proportion as the population, then it is considered to be representative. Representativeness can also be affected by the sample size, which should vary according to the population and issue being surveyed. It should be noted that non-representativeness can be employed in sampling to subject the study to the ultimate testing of the hypothesis.

interview requests was so low (5%) that the researcher had to evaluate alternative sample selection techniques. To this end students were asked on the questionnaire, issued to the whole population, to volunteer to be interviewed about the EMA. This type of sampling method is known as snowball/volunteer sampling, because a sample is established through recommendations and 'contacts', such as the request put forward for volunteer interviewees on the questionnaire. Opportunity sampling was considered as a final sampling technique if snowball/volunteer sampling proved ineffective. It was realised that any comparison of data from the discussion group and the interviews would be problematic because of the difference in the samples used. For this reason the discussion group was used to generate themes of enquiry for the other data collection techniques to apply.

The advantages of snowball/volunteer sampling are that it provides a sample when other sample selection methods are inaccessible and it usually ensures responsive respondents. However, it should be noted that the data collected are unlikely to be representative of the population, because volunteer sampling encourages respondents with a keen interest in the subject and enhances the potential for bias. The researcher was aware of this issue, but would argue that the views and attitudes examined through the interview group would be useful for raising issues about student perceptions of the EMA in relation to participation, retention and achievement in South West College. It should be noted that while attempting to conduct the interviews using this sampling method the researcher experienced a very low 'turn up' rate. 74 students volunteered to be interviewed of a population of 538, but for reasons unknown only ten students actually turned up for their scheduled interview (despite two weeks' notice, a reminder three days before the interview and permission to miss lessons if necessary). Consequently the research had to apply a third and final sampling method known as opportunity sample, which utilises any available member of the population as they become available. Applying this sampling method the research was able to achieve a respectable sample of 43 Year One students (1999 student cohort) (13% of the population) and was also able to avoid the potential bias associated with snowball/volunteer sampling methods. As Walker (1993) identified, research methods can change as the research develops and new problems emerge. It was believed that adapting to the problem of non-response through selecting a new sampling method was appropriate.

The staff sample frame was initially investigated as a whole population through a 'comments' form attached to the Year One (1999 student cohort) questionnaire. 24 tutors' responses were received. This approach was taken in order to establish tutor views and attitudes towards the EMA without imposing any researcher bias. It was believed that tutor perceptions would help to illuminate the aims of the study. It was also realised that these views and attitudes may have changed over the course of the study and the researcher wanted to investigate this further through the use of semi-structured interviews. Having constructed the Director of Studies interview schedule, it was decided that this interview schedule (see Appendix F) would act as a pilot interview schedule for the Year Two tutors. In Year Two, post initial course assessment (1999 student cohort), a semi-structured interview was conducted with the Director of Studies, who held responsibility for the EMA in the College. The Director of Studies at South West College was consulted throughout the research process for a variety of reasons:

- To ensure that the person with most knowledge of, information on and responsibility for, the EMA in the college was involved in the research and able to contribute accurate and up-to-date information.
- To ensure that access was maintained to data on the 1997 and 1999 cohorts and the 1999 student and staff cohort for primary research purposes.
- The Director of Studies' research background enabled her to comment on the structure of the primary research tools in their pilot stage and support the construction of more appropriately framed questions.

This interview acted as a pilot interview schedule for a random sample of the tutor population in Year Two (1999 cohort). Random sampling was selected in an attempt to establish a representative and reliable sample of Year Two tutors for a semi-structured interview. 20% of tutors were called for interview (11 tutors in total from a population of 55).

Design Implementation

1999 Student Cohort Discussion Group

32 of the 50 student sample took part in the discussion group, which made for a large, but productive group in terms of outcomes. It also raises the question of bias, in that the students who chose to attend may have had 'issues' about the EMA that they wanted to share. The discussion group was conducted five months after the EMA was implemented in the college (Term 2, Year One). It was decided that the students would need at least a college term (approximately four months) to form some opinions about the EMA. The students were invited by letter to take part in 'a discussion group on the EMA' and were told that their views and opinions would help to inform EMA practice in the college, through research being conducted within the college on the EMA. Ethical and methodological considerations at this point were identified, in that students should not be led on the question of whether the EMA had a positive or negative effect on the students' educational experience. Therefore the tone of the invitation letter was purposefully neutral (see Appendix A).

The student sample for the discussion group was given a time to attend that was in their lunch hour (30 minutes). It was realised by the researcher that this could affect the response rates and introduce bias, in that students may be unwilling to give up their free time unless they had something to say, whether positive or negative, leaving more 'neutral' comments out of the sample. However, after discussion with the Director of Studies¹⁵ in the college, it was decided that the research, in the first instance, should not affect the students' studies (although permission was given by the college for students to miss lessons if necessary at the interview stage). The researcher believes that ethically any research should not have a negative impact on the participants and should in fact benefit them. Missing lessons had the potential for a negative effect and therefore it was hoped that students in the sample could be tracked and called for interview during private study.

¹⁵ The Director of Studies at the College was consulted throughout the primary research process, ensuring that all available information about the EMA, both within the College and throughout the county, was given to the researcher. This was an important part of the strategy for monitoring the EMA, both for the support of data collection, but also in producing extra information on the effectiveness of the *process*, as well as the impact, of the EMA. It should be noted that monitoring the EMA was not a condition of the pilot.

rather than scheduled lessons. However, a lunchtime meeting was the only route for the discussion group, but fortunately the response rate was reasonably high (64%). Refreshments were offered free of charge as it was a lunchtime meeting (standard college practice for staff and students), which did raise an ethical consideration in relation to potential student bribery. The researcher, after consultation with the Director of Studies in the college, decided that the offer of refreshments would not be made on the invitation to the discussion group, but that refreshments would be available in the meeting.

The room chosen for the discussion group was a medium sized conference room, with the tables arranged in a large rectangle so that all the students could face each other. The researcher placed a tape recorder in the middle of the tables and sat in amongst the students. The tape recorder was switched on as soon as all of the students had arrived. The students were informed by the researcher that the discussion was going to be taped and advised any student not willing or wanting to participate in the research in this way to leave. The researcher informed the students that she was not going to take part in the discussion, but would warn the students five minutes before the end of the meeting. The researcher asked the students to feel free to speak about any issues concerning the EMA and that confidentiality would be respected in the recording and reporting of any findings. One question was asked by the researcher to start the discussion group conversation, "*What do you think about the Education Maintenance Allowance?*". The conversation flowed freely and established a large base of data from which to draw themes for the other research methods to be employed.

1999 Student Cohort Questionnaire and Tutor Comment Sheet – Year One

The pilot student questionnaire, issued to the 1999 student cohort, was constructed to meet the aims of the research through establishing questions that were important to those experiencing the effects of the EMA, the students. The questionnaire was discussed with the Director of Studies to check for appropriateness in the manner and content of the questions, the researcher keen to maintain college support for the case study. The pilot questionnaire (see Appendix B) was issued to a single Year One 1999 student cohort tutor group one month after the discussion group had taken place. The questionnaires were given

to the tutor to hand out to the students, who were asked to fill them in and return them to the post box in reception by a specific date.

A 'postal' response in relation to this educational practitioner based research refers to the pigeonholes of the tutors and a collection post box erected by the researcher at college reception. A letter to the tutors was provided alongside the questionnaires for students explaining the process involved in completing and returning the questionnaires. It was hoped that by encouraging students to complete the questionnaires in tutor group class time and returning them anonymously to the 'post box', a higher and more valid response would be achieved than if they were sent home (and potentially lost/forgotten) or handed back to the tutor (with teacher directed responses through student identity being known). Respondents were given a date by which to complete and return questionnaires. The researcher decided not to follow up non-respondents with a further questionnaire, because anonymity was assured to the respondent, which made this impossible.

The returned questionnaires allowed the researcher to change and modify the questionnaire for distribution to all Year One full-time students on advanced level courses enrolled since 1999. The full questionnaire (see Appendix C) was issued five weeks after the discussion group (Term 2, Year One), which meant that all students in the cohort had 'lived with' the EMA for six months, suggesting that they should have some familiarity with its content and process.

The questionnaires were issued to the 1999 student cohort through their tutors in a tutor period¹⁶ in the same college week. A collection post box was again erected by the researcher at college reception. A letter to the tutors was provided alongside the questionnaires, to explain to both tutors and students the process involved in completing and returning the questionnaires and an overview of the research (see Appendix D). The tutors' letter also had a 'comments' section and invitation to attend interview in Year Two, which they were encouraged to return by the deadline given. Tutor comments were collected in this manner in order to allow the generation of themes without the influence of the researcher. The questionnaire asked for students to volunteer to be interviewed on the

¹⁶ A tutor period is a timetabled piece of time in which the tutor meets with their tutees to discuss a range of educationally relevant issues, such as absence, key skills etc.

subject of the EMA. The students were made aware that their identity in answering the questionnaires would remain confidential and that was reinforced by the return method. A date was given for the final return of the questionnaires to allow the researcher time to analyse both the staff and student data before embarking on the next part of the research design.

1999 Student Cohort Interviews

An opportunity sample of 43 EMA recipients (of a population of 538) in the 1999 student cohort (Year One) (1999-2000) was used for the student interviews. A pilot interview was conducted in order to establish the final interview schedule (see Appendix E). The initial ten students from the volunteer sample who had turned up were interviewed and included in the opportunity sample. A private class room was appropriated in a quiet part of the college for use in all interviews and a chair was placed outside to act as a waiting area. A sign was put on the door stating 'QUIET – INTERVIEW IN PROGRESS'. Another sign was put on the wall above the chair stating 'PLEASE WAIT HERE FOR INTERVIEW'. The researcher kept a record sheet of who was supposed to attend and at what time.

On arrival students were shown into the interview room and told that their identity would be kept confidential, although the data would be used to inform a research paper for national distribution. The student was told that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time. The student was told that the interview would be taped and asked if this was acceptable. The tape recorder was then switched on. The interview schedule was used to guide the researcher in eliciting a detailed response from each student (hence the application of a semi-structured interview).

In adopting an opportunity sampling technique to attain the final 43 respondents, the researcher utilised the college's open access workshop, library and common room (all areas that students locate during private study), where students were asked qualifying questions to ensure that they fitted the sample criterion i.e. were they part of the 1999 student cohort?, and those that met the criteria were invited to interview there and then. The research was explained in neutral terms at the beginning of the interview and the opportunity to refuse was given. The same process for all the interviews was followed as stated above. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All the data collected on

tape were transcribed as soon as possible after each interview to improve accuracy of interpretation. The data were then analysed to establish any themes. It should be noted that in an early interview the tape recorder failed to tape part of the interview. Fortunately the researcher, being wary of such occurrences, checked each recording immediately after each interview. Therefore, part of the interview was repeated and the data collected. The extra cost in student time was appreciated.

Director of Studies Interview

In October 2000, post initial course assessment (1999 student cohort Year Two), a semi-structured interview schedule was constructed (see Appendix F) with the aim of examining the perceptions of the most informed person on the EMA, in relation to student participation, retention and achievement, in the college, the Director of Studies. The semi-structured interview was conducted in November 2000, a date chosen to reflect the fact that the 1999 student cohort had undertaken their first set of examinations and therefore some comment may possibly be made on the impact of the EMA on achievement.

The interview was arranged two weeks before the proposed date and conducted in the Director of Studies office. The interview was tape recorded and permission was granted, prior to the interview, for all data collected from the interview to be used for the purposes of the case study research. The interview schedule acted as a prompt for the main questions, but allowed the researcher to follow and explore interesting and relevant points that arose during the interview (see Appendix F1 for interview transcript). All the data collected on tape were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview to improve accuracy of interpretation. The data were then analysed to establish any themes.

Tutor Interviews

Tutors' opinions about the EMA had been examined during Year One of the 1999 cohort through the comments sheet attached to the student questionnaire to the 1999 student cohort. Having constructed the Director of Studies interview schedule, it was decided that this interview schedule (see Appendix F) would act as a pilot interview schedule for the Year Two tutors. The interview with the Director of Studies had elicited, what appeared to be appropriate responses i.e. questions were interpreted as the researcher intended.

ambiguity had been avoided etc., and therefore only minor changes to the interview schedule were made (see Appendix G).

11 tutors were invited to interview (20% of the population) and all attended. The semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of November 2000 (this date being chosen for the same reasons as stated in the Director of Studies interview). The interviews were held in a quiet office and arranged two weeks before they were conducted. The respondents were told, prior to the interview, that the interview would be taped and that all information collected would be used for research purposes. These conditions were accepted and the interviews took place without any practical problems. The tapes of the interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews to support accuracy of interpretation. The data were then analysed to establish any themes.

1999 Student Cohort Questionnaire – Year Two

The 1999 student cohort was surveyed as a whole population, using questionnaires, over two years, to examine potentially changing student attitudes and beliefs about the 'new' EMA.

The Year Two student questionnaire was constructed to meet the aims of the research through establishing a range of questions that were important to those experiencing the effects of the EMA. The Year One questionnaire (see Appendix C) acted as a guide for the Year Two questionnaire. The themes that had emerged from analysis of the data collected by the Year One questionnaires enabled the researcher to modify the Year Two questionnaire to make it more appropriate to the aims of the study. The questionnaire was discussed with the Director of Studies to check for appropriateness in the manner and content of the questions. It was agreed that the questionnaire could be issued to students (see Appendix H).

The 1999 student cohort Year Two questionnaire was issued in May 2001 (Term 3, Year Two), which meant that the students should be able to comment, in an informed manner (having lived with the EMA for two years), about the way in which they felt it had impacted on their further education experiences. The Questionnaires were issued to the 1999 student cohort through their tutors in a tutor period, in the same way as for the Year One questionnaire. A collection post

box was erected by the researcher at college reception. A letter to the tutors was provided alongside the questionnaires, to explain to both tutors and students the process involved in completing and returning the questionnaires and an overview of the research. The students were made aware that their identity in answering the questionnaires would remain confidential, which was reinforced by the return method. A date was given for the final return of the questionnaires to allow the researcher time to analyse the data.

1997 and 1999 Student Cohort – College Data

The data were collected in December 1999 and 2001 respectively for the appropriate cohort, because this date followed the November college deadline for submitting accurate student enrolment numbers to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). It also meant that data on the whole two years of the cohort could be analysed and that this analysis could be ongoing throughout the research process.

Data on participation, retention and achievement levels were provided in a variety of forms by the College, which resulted in the researcher analysing the data by making all three variables a percentage of the whole student population for the two years. It should be noted that college administration procedures changed during the four years under investigation, which resulted in some difficulties in tracking down some of the data. However, management support, particularly from the Vice-Principal, resulted in all of the necessary data being collected, but not necessarily in a format consistent with all of the other data. This was the reason for the researcher reducing all of the college data to a percentage for participation, retention and achievement for both the 1997 and 1999 student cohorts. Comparisons of the data for each cohort were made by comparing the percentage levels of participation, retention and achievement of the 1997 student cohort with that of the 1999 student cohort.

The Generation of Theory

As data were collected for this case study, it became clear that any analysis would involve ‘the generation of theory’ (Hammersley et al, 1994). The research moved from questions of ‘what’ or ‘how’ to questions of ‘why’, which established concepts from a more theoretical basis. Hammersley, *et al.* (1994), suggested that this facet of analysis involves

trying to understand events or reports from the participants' point of view, a consideration of comparative contexts and an exploration of alternative theories.

Hammersley, *et al.* (1994), see the development of theory as proceeding through 'comparative analysis', where:

Instances are compared across a range of situations, over a period of time, among a number of people and through a variety of methods. Attention to sampling is important if the theory being formulated concerns a particular population. Thus comparisons are made among a representative set. Negative cases are sought for these might perhaps invalidate the argument, or suggest contrary explanations....These kinds of comparisons, however, can also be used for other purposes – establishing accurate evidence, establishing empirical generalisations, specifying a concept (bringing out the distinctive elements or nature of the case) and verifying theory. (Hammersley *et al.*, 1994, p. 81)

Early theorising leads eventually to the identification of categories and concepts. Because these were grounded in the data, they influence the direction of the research through a process which Hammersley, *et al.* (1994), referred to as 'theoretical sampling', which means 'to ensure that all categories are identified and filled or groups fully researched' (p. 81).

The generation of theory process was complemented by the use of a research diary, comparisons with other material, considerations of reliability and validity, and interconnections within the data. 'Consulting the literature is an integral part of theory development. It helps to stimulate ideas and to give shape to the emerging theory, thus providing both commentary on, and a stimulus to, the study' (Hammersley, *et al.*, 1994, p. 81). Consulting colleagues for their knowledge and opinions can also serve as a useful 'sounding board' in the process of theory formation, as demonstrated by the data collected from the tutors and Director of Studies. The goal of analysis for this case study was the generation of theoretical or conceptual frameworks, rather than of testable hypotheses.

The following Chapter describes the data collected from the case study and its implications for the aims of the research. The data are presented through the themes generated by the research: allowing data collected by different methods, but on the same theme to be shown

together. Tables are used as exemplars of typical responses. Interview transcript is used to elucidate data.

Chapter Four – Findings

All of the data collected by the case study were used to investigate the effectiveness of the EMA on participation, retention and achievement for young people from low-income households on full-time advanced level academic and vocational courses at South West College. Theme analysis was used to analyse the data collected, in order to establish categories which represent the perceptions and awareness of the respondents. Data items were systematically labelled in terms of one or more categories, allowing comparisons and contrasts to be made (Hutchinson, 1988). Categories were therefore not established at the start of the research, but emerged from the data and were clarified throughout the process of data analysis in relation to the research questions.

Principal categories have, where this was appropriate, been supplemented by sub-categories which represent more specific areas within a more general context. To illuminate the case study, different types of response have been illustrated by a response (quotation) typical of that type for respondent's detailed responses to appropriate questions¹⁷. The research findings are presented below under the two main themed headings that were generated by a discussion group with 1999 student cohort (Year One) (Drever, 1995):

Theme 1 General Perceptions about the EMA – Students identified a lack of, or poor quality information about, the EMA prior to starting college. This led the researcher to explore issues of participation. How was student participation in further education affected by the EMA if students were not given information about the EMA in Year 11? Students also identified delays in receiving EMA payment when at college, which led the researcher to examine attitudes towards the EMA in relation to attendance criteria for payment (attendance being linked to possible future achievement) and retention (staying on the course). The amount of funding provided by the EMA was also highlighted by the students. This led the researcher to investigate the amount of payment and its adequacy for student needs.

¹⁷ Appropriate question refers to open-ended questions seeking a detailed response.

which could impact on the EMA's effect on student participation, retention and achievement.

Theme 2 The Effectiveness of the EMA - Students perceived the EMA as a good idea. This led the researcher to explore students' and staff's perceptions about the EMA and its effect on participation, retention and achievement.

It should be noted that the non experimental design of the questionnaires conducted in Year One and Year Two of the 1999 cohort (see Appendices C and I) focused the analysis, with results serving to illuminate the central issues in relation to the respondents, demonstrating an indication of attitudes rather than explanations and generalisations. For the Year One and Year Two questionnaire, each question was analysed separately, but data will be presented thematically. In order to maintain clarity in the presentation of these findings, questions from the Year One questionnaire will be referred to by its appendix reference of *C*, while the Year Two questions will be referred to as *I*, for example Year One Questionnaire question 1 becomes questions C1. Any statistical analysis was rudimentary, being presented as a percentage of respondents. Tables have been used as exemplars of a typical response to questions contained within the questionnaires.

In the 1999 cohort Year One, the college had a total student population of 883¹⁸ on full-time advanced level courses. 583 students responded to the Year One questionnaire, resulting in a total response rate of 66%. However the response rate among students receiving the EMA (referred to as EMA recipients) was 70% (538 students in South West College were in receipt of the EMA, 377 of these responded to the questionnaire). In the 1999 cohort Year Two, the college had a total student population of 691 on full-time advanced level courses. 363 students responded to the Year Two questionnaire, resulting in a total response rate of 53%. However, as in Year One, the response rate among the EMA recipient student population in the 1999 Year Two cohort was higher at 59%. South West College had a total of 364 EMA recipients in Year Two of the 1999 student cohort of which 214 students responded to the Year Two questionnaire. The response rate was lower than in Year One, but appears high enough to allow a rudimentary comparison of the

¹⁸ At the time of the questionnaire the student population was 883. However, in November 1999, the date for recording initial participation rates in the college, the student population was 902

attitudes held by the 1999 student cohort in the first year of their full-time advanced level courses and in the second year.

The number of students who did not apply for the EMA in Year One and Year Two of the 1999 cohort was identified in the student questionnaires to indicate the extent of the EMA take-up prior to college data on this being available. The attitudes of students not receiving the EMA (non-EMA recipients) were identified in Year One and Year Two of the 1999 cohort for questions C2, C3, I3 and I4 only of the questionnaires, because the researcher wanted to investigate the attitudes of students from low-income backgrounds - EMA recipients, this having a greater contribution toward the aims of the research. However, non-EMA recipients' responses to the questions identified could be used as an indication of student awareness about the EMA and suggest its effect on student participation in further education (Year 1), as well as offering general student perceptions about the EMA.

The information collected by the student questionnaires was supplemented by more detailed student responses collected using semi-structured interviews based on an opportunity sample of 43 EMA recipients in the 1999 Year One student cohort. An interview schedule (Appendix E) was designed to elicit student perceptions on the issues that had been raised by students in the discussion group. The findings of the semi-structured student interviews have been analysed and presented according to the categories previously stated.

Perceptions about the EMA were also collected from tutors administrating, and a manager overseeing (Director of Studies), the EMA at South West College. It was hoped that the issues pertinent to the case study could be examined using these perceptions, offering comparisons and differences to student perceptions and illumination to the research questions.

Initially a letter was sent to tutors as an attachment to the Year One Questionnaire (Appendix D) requesting comments on the EMA. The Tutor Letter was issued to the whole 1999 staff cohort (70 Year One Advanced Level course tutors), but achieved a relatively low response rate of 34%. The question of representativeness has to be raised, in that it appeared that those tutors most interested or concerned by the EMA appeared to be the

ones that responded. The tutor comments were analysed and categorised in relation to the themes generated by the student discussion group.

The interview with the Director of Studies acted as a pilot interview schedule for the semi-structured tutor interview schedule and demanded only minor amendments (see Appendix G). A randomly stratified sample of 11 second year tutors was selected to take part in the interviews (20% of the total population). It was hoped that by adopting this sampling technique the tutors would be representative of the population. The data collected from the Director of Studies and tutor interviews were analysed and are presented through extracts from the interview transcripts within the categories generated by the discussion group.

Data collected by the college for students between 1997 and 2001 were analysed to elicit information on student participation, retention and achievement rates for full-time advanced level vocational and academic courses. The data collected over this time were not consistent and therefore the analysis involved the researcher reducing student participation, retention and achievement as variables in South West College to a percentage of the whole student population (for advanced level courses) over two years (Table 9 and Table 17). The participation, retention and achievement rates of the 1997 cohort were examined in order to act as a base line (control) for students not receiving the EMA. This information was compared to the data analysed on participation, retention and achievement for students entering the college on advanced level courses in 1999 who were offered the EMA dependent on parental income.

The percentage levels of participation, retention and achievement of the 1997 student cohort (non-EMA) compared with that of the 1999 student cohort (EMA), although crude, offer an impression on whether the EMA has any positive impact of student participation, retention and achievement in post-16 education at South West College (assuming that all other variables affecting students within both cohorts of the case study are similar). The findings are presented through the themes established.

Theme 1 - General Perceptions about the EMA

Student and Staff Awareness of the EMA

Question C2 'Was the EMA explained to you prior to starting College?' was asked on the Year One questionnaire only (being of relevance to new College students only) and was designed to elicit information on whether students felt that they understood how the EMA worked and what it entitled them to *before* starting college. The reason the data might be useful is that they may indicate the influence of the EMA on participation. If the EMA had contributed to students enrolling on a full-time advanced level course then they would have to know about the EMA *before* participating in that course.

65% of EMA recipient respondents claimed that the EMA had been explained clearly to them before enrolling in the college. 46% of respondents reported that their teacher at school had informed them about the EMA; while 10% had been told about the EMA by the college itself (the remaining 8% had been informed by careers officers). 34% of EMA recipient respondents had not received a clear explanation about the EMA (1% chose not to respond to this question) (Table 1).

Table 1: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One EMA Recipient Respondents to the Question 'Was the EMA explained clearly to you prior to starting college?'

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes Teacher	175	46.4	46.4
Yes Careers	31	8.2	54.6
Yes College	37	9.8	64.5
No	129	34.2	98.7
No Response	5	1.3	100
Total	377	100	

Only 41% of non-EMA recipients felt that the EMA had been explained clearly to them before starting college (Table 2). 25% of respondents reported that the school had informed them about the EMA, while 8% of respondents stated that careers officers told them about

the EMA and 8% cited the college. Therefore over half of the non-EMA recipients in Year One of the 1999 student cohort, 57%, felt that the EMA had not been explained clearly to them prior to starting college.

Table 2: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One Non-EMA Recipient Respondents to the Question ‘Was the EMA explained clearly to you prior to starting college?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes School	51	24.8	24.8
Yes Careers	17	8.3	33.0
Yes College	17	8.3	41.3
No	118	57.3	98.5
No Response	3	1.5	100
Total	206	100	

The total response rate for students who felt that the EMA had been explained clearly to them before starting college was 53%. This figure suggests that participation rates in the college for full-time advanced level courses in the academic year 1999 may indicate a rise on examination of college data, because just over half of students in that cohort were aware of the EMA. However the researcher would not expect a large rise in participation, because 47% remained uninformed. It is interesting to note that non-EMA recipients were less informed about the EMA, which may indicate one of the reasons why they had not applied for the EMA and consequently suggest that informed students had a higher take up rate of the EMA. This may be an area that could benefit from further investigation, but lies outside of this case study.

Student responses to Question 5 ‘Would you like to make any final comments about the EMA?’ of the student interview identified a lack of or poor quality information about the EMA prior to starting college:

Interviewer

(I): *“And would you like to make any final comments about EMA?”*

Student 3: *“Just mainly that they should inform people like especially when you’re in secondary school that you do get EMA, cause they don’t find out till the start of college.”*

College data demonstrated that participation had not been affected by the introduction of the EMA, possibly because it was a new initiative and many students were not fully aware of it at its inception. College data allowed a comparison of participation rates between the 1997 non EMA student cohort and the 1999 EMA student cohort, which both had the same size eligible population, demonstrating that there was actually a small decrease in student participation between 1997 and 1999 for students entering full-time advanced level courses, with numbers falling from 905 to 902 (Table 3).

Table 3: College Student Participation Figures of Further Education Students on Full-time Advanced Level Courses Starting in 1997 and 1999.

	1997 – 1999 Non EMA cohort Participation		1999 – 2001 EMA cohort Participation
November 1 1997	905/100%	November 1 1999	902/100%

This is an important issue when investigating one of the aims of this case study – participation. Students would have to have knowledge of the EMA before starting college if it was to influence their decision to go on into further education. Question C2 of the 1999 student cohort Year One questionnaire showed that 65% of EMA recipient respondents claimed that the EMA had been explained clearly to them before enrolling in the college (Table 1). College data demonstrated that participation had not been affected by the introduction of the EMA, possibly because it was a new initiative and many students were not fully aware of it at its inception.

Question C3/I3 ‘Do you understand what the EMA entitles you to?’ was asked of both Year One and Year Two students to identify whether students who were now at the college were fully aware of the EMA and what it could offer them. This question was asked of both EMA and non-EMA recipients to see if students who had not applied for the EMA knew of their entitlement. In Year One 95% of EMA recipients and 67% of non-EMA

recipients stated that they did understand what the EMA entitled them to, suggesting a sound awareness of the EMA for those who had applied or were receiving it, but less awareness for those who had not applied for it. It also suggests that the EMA had been applied for by all the students who were well informed about the EMA (see Q 2). In Year Two 100% of EMA recipients and 89% of non-EMA recipients stated that they understood what the EMA entitled them to, suggesting an increased understanding of the EMA for students in their second year at college. It also shows, however, that non-EMA recipients remained less informed than EMA recipients.

These responses are also useful because they demonstrate that the students in receipt of the EMA understand (particularly by Year Two) the full entitlement of the EMA and what that relates to in terms of student commitment. The EMA payment is conditional on full attendance (to receive weekly payment), which may impact on achievement; commitment to staying on the course (to receive the end of year bonus), which may affect retention and achieving the qualification at the end of the course (to receive successful completion of course bonus). The data suggest that the students are fully aware of the EMA entitlements (and hence conditions), which should therefore encourage optimum attendance, commitment and results (retention and achievement).

Question C4 'When did you apply for the EMA?' of the student questionnaire only needed to be asked on entry to the college and was therefore posed to Year One students in the 1999 student cohort only. The question was used to support responses to question C2 (Table 1), suggesting student knowledge of the EMA before or after starting college (demonstrated by time of application for the EMA). 71% of EMA recipient respondents in Year One of the 1999 Student cohort stated that they had applied for the EMA before starting college. This is slightly higher than the 65% of EMA recipient respondents who claimed to have had the EMA explained to them prior to starting college in question C2. However, the 6% positive difference in application for, and explanation of, the EMA does not suggest that students were not being truthful in their responses to question C2; the difference may be accounted for by application without full information. Overall, the responses to questions C2 and C4 are similar enough to suggest reliability for the questionnaire data.

Table 4 presents the percentage response rate of EMA recipient respondents' time of application for the EMA. The table shows that although the majority of students entering Year One of a two year advanced level course in receipt of the EMA had applied before starting college, a further 13% of students applied in September and 6% in October. This suggests that once at college, students were given or obtained information straight away about the EMA and applied retrospectively. In relation to the aims of this case study, the responses to this question suggest that the majority of EMA recipient students were aware of the EMA before starting college and that this may have impacted on their decision to attend college (participation).

Table 4: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question 'When did you apply for the EMA?'

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Before College	268	71.1	71.1
September	47	12.5	83.6
October	21	5.6	89.1
November	10	2.7	91.8
December	11	2.9	94.7
January	13	3.4	98.1
No Response	7	1.9	100
Total	377	100	

Question C5 'Why did you leave your application until this time?' was asked of respondents to question C4 who had not applied for the EMA before starting college. The question was intended to elicit information on why they had not applied for the EMA before starting college, relating to aims of this case study on participation. An informed student on the EMA may affect participation rates; an uninformed student would not, hence the importance to the research of knowing student awareness of the EMA prior to starting college. Therefore it is interesting to note that only 9% of EMA recipient respondents in the 1999 student cohort stated that they were not aware that they could apply for the EMA.

suggesting that the majority of EMA recipient students had been informed appropriately about the EMA before starting college.

The other reasons students gave for not applying for the EMA before starting college were that they had had difficulties with the application process (15%). The data could offer information for future research on the process of application involved in the EMA. It suggests that if the process was changed and application was made easier, then more students might apply more quickly. 5% of respondents had forgotten to apply and the final 3% stated 'other' reasons for not applying, however all of these responses fell into the 'administration category', particularly the problems associated with financial status declarations for self-employed parents:

(Yr1:455¹⁹) "My parents are self employed and it took until then for their tax returns etc. to be dealt with"

Student interview Question 1 'Tell me as much as you can about the Education Maintenance Allowance' supported the findings of questions C2, C3, I3, C4 and C5 of the student questionnaires, demonstrating that the majority of students interviewed had a sound knowledge of the EMA and those who first answered that they did not know much about the EMA showed sound knowledge on further prompting:

Student 2: *"You're paid up to £30 per week in to the student's bank account between Saturdays. It's paid in every week on a Friday in term time and it's paid by the County Council, LEA as far as I know."*

Student 24: *"It's a pilot scheme that's just been started in ***** for current first year A Level students who are given money on a weekly basis depending on how much their parents earn."*

Student 37: *"It gets paid to students depending on how much their parents earn...like...it's below £30,000 or something like that depending on how much the student gets."*

I: *"Do you know how the EMA is paid"?*

Student 37: *"Oh, just into a bank account weekly."*

¹⁹ The coding refers to the Year of the student responding and the number given to the student who responded (allowing responses to be tracked in future research if necessary) i.e. Yr1: 247 refers to a Year One student identified as number 247.

The Director of Studies demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the EMA, explaining fully the role of the college in the piloting of the EMA nationally and role of the EMA for students entering further education in 1999 from Year 11:

Director of

Studies (DS): *Right, essentially it's a payment to a cohort of students, students who were in last year's Year Eleven and the previous cohort. It was introduced as an incentive to encourage students to stay on, but also to provide support for students who stayed on in full time educational training.*

The data from the interviews and the questionnaires are useful because they demonstrate awareness of the EMA within South West College and what that relates to in terms of student commitment. The data suggest that the students and management have a very good knowledge of the EMA, which should therefore encourage optimum attendance, commitment and results (retention and achievement).

Administration of the EMA

Questions C7/I5 'Have you received any payment through the EMA yet?'/ 'Have you received any payment of the EMA for this academic year?' were asked of both Year One and Year Two EMA recipient students in the 1999 student cohort. The discussion group had raised the issue of 'poor administration' in relation to the EMA, stating that many of them had not received any payment of the EMA. This question was used to establish how many students were receiving their EMA payment in each year. The researcher believed that students who had not received their EMA payment may have a different attitude towards the grant compared to those students who had received payment, an issue that could be followed up in future research on processes involved with obtaining the EMA.

In relation to the aims of this case study, non receipt of EMA payment by those students that had made a claim and were entitled to payment could possibly affect retention rates i.e. students may not be able to, or have the motivation to, attend South West College if the money was not forthcoming. This issue has the potential to be developed in future research, acknowledging that the case study is a reflection of one college's ability to put the EMA into effect and may not be indicative of national administration processes.

76% of EMA recipients in Year One of the 1999 student cohort stated that they had received a payment of the EMA (Table 5). 20% stated that they had not yet received any payment, despite having been at the college for five months. This suggests that there were some problems associated with processing the EMA, although the majority of students who had applied for the EMA had received it successfully. In Year Two, focusing just on that academic year, 86% of EMA recipient students had received payments eight months into the year. Only 6% of students had not received their financial entitlement in the second year of the EMA (Table 6).

Table 5: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Have you received payment of the EMA yet?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	288	76.4	76.4
No	77	20.4	96.8
No Response	12	3.2	100
Total	377	100	

Table 6: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Have you received any payment of the EMA for this academic year?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	183	85.5	85.5
No	12	5.6	91.1
No Response	19	8.9	100
Total	214	100	

This suggests that the issues resulting in non-payment of the EMA in the first year of the pilot had been greatly resolved by the second year (accepting that the LEA had three extra months to get payments to students). In relation to retention, the high level of student payment for the EMA should impact positively on students remaining on the course, particularly in the second year. In other words, the majority of students entitled to the

EMA, in both Year One and Year Two, have responded that payment was received: suggesting that lack of finance would not be a reason for leaving college before the course had finished.

Question C9/I6 ‘What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving the EMA?’ was asked to both Year One and Year Two EMA recipients in the 1999 student cohort questionnaires, to establish the type of difficulties encountered by students in applying for the EMA. It was hoped that the responses to this question would develop the theme of questions C7 and I5. Both Year One and Year students were asked to see if issues about the processes involved with the EMA had changed over the two years. Again, this would be an area for further research should any interesting data emerge.

In Year One of the 1999 student cohort only 26% of EMA recipient students did not experience any difficulties in receiving their EMA (Table 7).

Table 7: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving the EMA?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No Difficulties	96	25.5	25.5
Getting Payment After Starting College	150	39.8	65.3
Delayed Weekly Payments	42	11.1	76.4
Incorrect Payment	10	2.7	79.0
Other	57	15.1	94.2
No Response	22	5.8	100
Total	377	100	

69% of students claimed that they had experienced difficulties in getting payment of their EMA, identifying payments starting after beginning college (40%), delayed weekly payments (11%), incorrect payment (3%) and other factors (15%) generating the themes of non-payment and poor processing of EMA forms:

- (Yr1:1) *“Haven’t received payment yet.”*
 (Yr1:178) *“Forms keep coming but no money.”*
 (Yr1:105) *“They won’t send me the forms although they have said I should get it.”*
 (Yr1:147) *“My form was lost.”*
 (Yr1:297) *“Claiming they have paid it when they haven’t then causing a delay in payment.”*
 (Yr1:428) *“No pay at all requesting tax returns when not done.”*

In Year Two of the 1999 student cohort, more EMA recipient students experienced difficulties in receiving their EMA than they had done in Year One (despite more students in Year Two stating that they had received payment for that academic year in question I5). Only 18% of EMA recipient students in Year Two had not experienced difficulties in getting their EMA (Table 8).

Table 8: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving the EMA?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No Difficulties	38	17.8	17.8
Getting Payment After Starting College	47	22.0	39.7
Delayed Weekly Payments	49	22.9	62.6
Incorrect Payment	14	6.5	69.2
Other	45	21.0	90.2
No Response	21	9.8	100
Total	214	100	

72% of students had experienced some difficulty in receiving the EMA, identifying payment starting after beginning college (22%), delayed weekly payments (23%), incorrect level of payment (7%) and other factors (21%) generating different themes to Year one of inconsistent payments and problems in recording of attendance:

- (Yr2:38) *“Payments have been inconsistent and register errors also seem a common cause.”*
 (Yr2:68) *“Stopping payments for no reason.”*

- (Yr2:99) *“Problems with absences not addressed to me- so EMA stopped without knowing why!”*
- (Yr2:106) *“Being crossed off the roll for no reason”*
- (Yr2:154) *“Not being paid for previously authorised absences”*
- (Yr2:165) *“It doesn't always come even with 100% attendance. Then get backlogged for months.”*

Question 5 ‘Would you like to make any final comments about the EMA?’ of the student interview also generated the theme of administration. Many students commented on what they perceived to be the problems of the EMA administrative system. Their causes for concern included:

The day on which the payment was received - it was believed that a payment on Monday would be better than a payment on Friday, because students would be more likely to spend the money on necessary educational resources, rather than on socialising over the weekend:

- I: *“No problems (with the EMA)?”*
- Student 42: *“I was going to say the timing of it is a bit bad I think if it was at the beginning of the week it would be better for people to spend it... being on the weekend people will take it and they'll use it for other things rather than you know what they should be.”*

Missing a lecture because of illness – this could result in non-payment or delayed payment, discouraging students from attending for the rest of the week when better:

- I: *“And finally is there anything you would like to add? Would you like to make any final comments about EMA?”*
- Student 20: *“I don't think it's right where they if you say you've got to go to the dentist or doctors or something like that it gets taken for the whole week... We had this discussion the other week with one of my friends, she had to go to the dentist the other week and she didn't get her money, but then what's the point in coming in.”*

Self-employment for parents - this resulted in a delay when completing financial details on the forms, generally because of tax returns, and then a delay in payment for the student:

- I: *“So finally, would you like to make any final comments about EMA?”*
- Student 16: *“Just that I think it's very discriminative towards self employed people, because my parents, my father is actually a farmer and the first time I didn't get any EMA because we have our accounts costed by Exeter University for*

the government, so they take a lot longer to get through the accountant...So I lost about £600.00 - £700.00 so I'm not very pleased.

Disparity of payment - all students should receive an education maintenance allowance of some kind:

I: *“And would you like to make any final comments about EMA?”*
Student 31: *“I don't think it's that fair. I think if anything they should give everybody something per week rather than certain people. Okay some people's parents are quite rich, but they still don't get any money from their parents and I don't think that's fair, but I don't know.”*

Use of payment - it was argued that payment should be made to the college, who in turn would supply the student with resources to ensure that the money was being spent on education:

I: *“And would you like to make any final comments on EMA?”*
Student 35: *“I think the system could be improved on how they decide who to give the money to and maybe if you needed things from college the money should go to the college so you could buy through them and they'd pay for it. I mean because the money is being wasted on young people going out and being young and it's not fair on people that don't get that advantage.”*

Delays in payment – payment had been agreed, but did not arrive on time:

I: *“And finally would you like to make any comments?”*
Student 39: *“Yeah, I would say it actually is a good idea...But the problem is the delay, it took us quite a few months to receive it and if the process could be speeded up that would be a big help for the people who need it straight at the beginning of college, that's when it's mostly needed and people. It took me about 3 months to get my EMA through.”*

These perceived problems with the EMA identified by the students lie outside the current investigation for this case study, but would act as the basis for further interesting and useful research into this field.

The analysis of comments by college tutors (Appendix D) also suggested that, like the students, tutors had identified problems with the way in which the EMA had been administered. However, unlike the students, the tutors linked the problems with administration to problems within the classroom of:

Poor student attitude -

"Some students have accessed it already. Some students are still waiting. Some students still receive full EMA although they do not attend full-time, which just 1) mocks the system 2) mocks encouraging students to attend 3) allows for 'I can do what I want because I'll still get my money' attitude! Only come to college for the EMA "easy money."

Poor student attendance -

"1)The students on EMA seem to be the worst attenders! 2) It's a lot of extra work to complete the 'Student Attendance' forms."

Students lying about absences –

"Unfair system- some students "abusing" absence reasons and self certificate submissions."

Student resentment over payments -

"I thought you might be interested to learn I've had a phone call from a parent who is worried that her son has too much cash and is using it to buy pot!!! Resentment in students that don't receive it as those who do are perceived to be spending it on going out etc. and not books/equipment for college; also bonuses for full attendance. Perceived as unfair as it should be an incentive available to all students. Generally perceived as a good idea, but unfair in the uses the money is put to!"

The perceptions of tutors toward the EMA were further examined through interviews conducted in Year Two of the case study. Despite being able to see potential positive outcomes for the EMA, when tutors were asked if they would like to make any final comments about the EMA, all tutors who chose to comment offered insight into the problems of the current EMA system. The focus of their concern was on the fairness of the way in which the EMA was paid:

Tutor 10: *"The structure of the payment system (EMA) is only as sound as the personal tutors monitoring absence. I get the impression that some (many?) students are 'getting away with it' by playing the system."*

In particular the way in which student absence could result in non-payment (an area already identified for further future investigation):

Tutor 2: *"Tutees play on lecturers' sympathy, giving lame excuses and we, the tutors, allow them to do so. I know I've ok'd some very dubious reasons for absence. This is especially true for the second years as we are all friends and there is pressure on me to 'let me off' and sign the form."*

And the ways in which absences were recorded:

Tutor 1: "Some students are becoming quite frustrated and exasperated, because although they have been attending full-time, every lesson, the register did not have their name on. As a consequence this has prevented them from receiving payment. Notification in mile high wording has gone back on the register, but to no avail! For example, a student transferred from one tutor group to another 3rd October 2000 and is still not on the register January 2001! Therefore the college has number 1 – let the student down, number 2 – affected the learning, number 3 – disaffected the student and number 4 – will this student achieve given the worry etc. now?"

It should be noted that students entitled to the EMA have to demonstrate full attendance in order to receive their allowance. Lecturers complete a register of attendance for each lesson to monitor student attendance, but in the first year of the EMA students were able to self-certificate for absences by completing a form on their return. By monitoring this process through the case study, using feedback from tutors and interviews with students in the 1999 cohort (the data collected being analysed as an ongoing process throughout the research), it was realised that a small minority of students may have been falsely self-certificating and therefore claiming the EMA when they were missing college.

Consequently at the beginning of Year Two the system was changed and students were no longer able to self-certificate, but instead had to authorise absences through their tutor.

This was an important change to the process of the EMA and highlighted the importance of a monitoring strategy. It also highlighted the college's stand on fraudulent claims for the EMA, which in turn reinforced the importance of attendance (participation) to students (as evidenced by the data collected from the student interviews in section Theme 2 - Achievement).

It offers cause for concern therefore that some tutors suggested that a student attendance criterion was being incorrectly recorded in Year Two of the EMA. If tutors felt that staff were not recording absences accurately and students were being authorised for absences that they should not have been authorised for, then this suggests that the impact of the EMA on attendance, and potentially achievement, will be reduced. It also suggests that the difficulties in recording absence in Year One had not been fully overcome in Year Two.

An investigation into the monitoring and recording student absence would make an interesting piece of further research in evaluating the impact of the EMA.

The themes identified by the students and tutors, and the number of students having difficulties with receiving the EMA in both Year One and Year Two, demonstrate that there are areas of concern in relation to the payment of the EMA. These areas cannot be explored within the remit of this case study, but would be a worthy study for future research, in that any data may help to refine the process of EMA application and payment. In relation to the aims of this case study, the responses suggest that difficulties in administration with the EMA could affect student participation, retention and achievement, particularly through delays and/or lack of payment.

There was an understanding of the importance of regular payments to sustain full participation in college activities through the purchasing of resources to the payment of transport costs and food. Students were aware that a lump sum payment in lieu of missed regular payments may jeopardise their ability to stay on a course and/or may encourage them not to spend the money on educational needs. Therefore the late payment of the EMA has implications for student retention levels. If students do not get their EMA payments on time, it could result in them having to leave the course. However, as demonstrated by question 3 of the interviews and questions C12/I9 (see section Theme 2 - Retention), most students did not relate the EMA payment to staying on the course. This said, even if only a few students decide to remain at college because they know that their EMA payment will eventually come through, then this can be seen as a positive step towards improving retention. College data (Table 9) indicated an improvement in retention of 2.65% for the 1999 cohort compared to the 1997 student cohort.

Table 9: College Student Participation and Retention Figures of Further Education Students on Full-time Advanced Level Courses Starting in 1997 and 1999.

	1997 – 1999 Non EMA cohort Participation/Retention		1999 – 2001 EMA cohort Participation/Retention
November 1 1997	905/100%	November 1 1999	902/100%
November 1 1998	703/76.35%	November 1 2000	737/81%
May 15 1999	675/72.75%	May 15 2001	691/75.4%

Level of Funding of the EMA

Question C10/I7 ‘Is the EMA a realistic level of funding i.e. does it provide enough financial support to fund your studies: e.g. books, paper etc.?’ was asked in the student questionnaires to both Year One and Year Two EMA recipients in the 1999 student cohort, to establish student perception on the amount of financial remuneration being given to them. It was asked to both Year groups in order to examine whether their attitudes had changed after one year of receipt of the EMA. In Year Two the students had lived with the EMA for at least a year and this experience may have been different to what they thought it was going to be when commenting in Year One. In relation to the aims of this case study, student perception on the appropriateness of the level of funding for the EMA is important because it could impact on student participation, retention and achievement. A grant that is seen to be inadequate is likely not to be applied for, which in turn could affect students’ decisions to participate in post-16 education, stay on in post-16 education or buy resources for courses affecting consequent achievement.

In Year One of the 1999 student cohort of EMA recipients 70% believed that the amount paid to students by the EMA was adequate to support them financially for the various demands of their studies (Table 10), as the following responses drawn from the questionnaire displays:

- (Yr1:325) “£30 a week covers stationary paperbacks books bus fare.”
 (Yr1:472) “£30 a week is right because it helps with resources but also can go to educational trips.”

Just under a quarter of students (24%) stated that it was not a realistic level of funding. Only two students believed that the EMA payment was too generous, the other 90 students felt that the level of payment should be increased, with most students citing £40 or £50 as a realistic level of funding. The themes that emerged to justify this latter perception were the cost of transport to college (including bus passes and petrol):

(Yr1:173) £40 a week. Would go further to help pay for bus pass."

(Yr1:45) "Everybody should get the same amount of £50 a week because need money for transport, food."

The cost of resources and trips that were needed to support learning on college courses:

(Yr1:15) "£40 a week. More money is needed for paper, books and educational visits."

(Yr1:234) "£50-60 a week. It funds all small costs, but the college does trips to France and Florida etc. and it could help with the costs."

The data collected from Year One for this question suggest that the majority of students receiving the EMA believe that it is a realistic level of funding to support their studies. Those students who do not believe it is an appropriate amount of funding feel that it should be increased, because of the necessary and increasing costs of transport and educational resources that being a student in post-16 education entail. The data collected from Year Two of the 1999 student cohort were very similar to Year One, except for responses to whether the EMA was not a realistic level of funding. 64% of EMA recipients in Year Two believed that the EMA was a realistic level of funding, 28% felt that it was not realistic and 8% failed to respond (Table 11)

Table 10: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Is the EMA a realistic level of funding i.e. does it provide enough financial support to fund your studies: e.g. books, paper etc.?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	264	70.0	70.0
No	92	24.4	94.4
Yes and No	1	0.3	94.7
No Response	20	5.3	100
Total	377	100	

Table 11: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Is the EMA a realistic level of funding i.e. does it provide enough financial support to fund your studies: e.g. books, paper etc.?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	136	63.6	63.6
No	60	28.0	91.6
No Response	18	8.4	100
Total	214	100	

It is interesting to note, however, that the attitudes of Year Two students in relation to why the EMA was a realistic level of funding had changed. There was a clear dichotomy demonstrated by the responses to this question in that just under half of the respondents to the open response part of the question felt that the EMA gave too much funding and just over half felt that it was not enough. The theme that emerged suggest that after living with the EMA for at least a year, some students were aware that payments were not being used exclusively for funding studies and therefore believed that funding should be reduced or removed:

(Yr2:45) “£0 per week. Not necessary”

- (Yr2:109) *“£10 to 15 per week. Enough for bus fares; people just spend the rest on socialising.”*
- (Yr2:157) *“The money rarely gets spent on books paper etc..”*

However, some students were aware that funding was inadequate, because students had to pay for education resources and/or transport themselves:

- (Yr2:95) *“£40 to 50 per week. Petrol costs, bus tickets, books, stationary the money only just pays for me to get in to college for 4 days!”*
- (Yr2:144) *“ Students have often to find a job whilst in study, this distracts them: payment should be increased to £50.”*

The responses from Year Two for this question suggest that the majority of students receiving the EMA believe that it is a realistic level of funding to support their studies. Those students who do not believe it is an appropriate amount of funding are divided on whether it should be increased, because of the necessary and increasing costs of transport and education resources that being a student in post-16 education entail, or decreased/withdrawn, because it is not being spent on education resources. In relation to the aims of this case study the data suggest that the majority of EMA recipient students perceive the EMA to realistically fund their studies, which should support applications for the EMA and potentially have a positive impact on participation, retention and achievement.

Aims of the EMA

Question C6/I4 ‘Do you think that the EMA is a good idea in further education?’ was constructed to illustrate student perceptions of the aims of the EMA i.e. if the EMA was a good idea, why was it a good idea, what was it aiming to achieve. For Year One students this question was only asked of EMA recipients. On reflection it was decided to ask both EMA recipients and non-EMA recipients in Year Two of the 1999 student cohort. The reason for this was that asking non-EMA recipients may demonstrate a difference of opinion between those who were receiving it and those who were not, which could reveal conflicting opinions that in turn may affect student participation, retention and results e.g. a student may decide not to go on to further education, because they will not be entitled to the EMA, or once in further education, they may not work as hard as an EMA student

because there are no direct financial incentives attached. If the data suggest these results, they would provide an interesting area for future research.

91% of EMA recipient respondents in Year One believed that the EMA was a good idea. In Year Two exactly the same percentage (91%) of EMA recipient students still thought the EMA was a good idea, while only 53% of non-EMA recipients felt this way (although only 25% thought the EMA was not a good idea and 22% were not sure). This question also had a response option for both Year One and Year Two. The main reasons established by students, for a positive statement about the EMA, were the same for Year One and Year Two, EMA and Non-EMA recipients, suggesting no change in student attitudes toward the EMA over the Two Year case study for this question. The positive themes that emerged to justify the EMA as a good idea were put into categories and have been supported by a range of student statements from Year One and Year Two:

The EMA helps students to attend college (participation/attendance/retention):

- (Yr1:250) *“Helps with money so that you can go to college”*
- (Yr1:319) *“Gives an incentive to continue with college, helps out financially”*
- (Yr1:464) *“It encourages going to lectures”*
- (Yr2:132) *“It encourages students to go into FE”*
- (Yr2:68) *“It makes people go to lectures”*
- (Yr2:154) *“Helps students to stay at college”*

The EMA helps with travel expenses to attend College (attendance-achievement):

- (Yr1:221) *“Covers cost of my weekly travel”*
- (Yr2:40) *“It provides money for transport”*

The EMA helps with buying equipment and funding trips for courses (achievement):

- (Yr1:12) *“It helps to pay for things that you may not have been able to afford e.g. College trips”*
- (Yr2:20) *“It allows me to pay for my resources without having to work outside college”*

The EMA takes the pressure off students having to undertake part-time employment while at college (achievement):

- (Yr1:218) *“Students doing full time courses don't have time to go out and earn money”*
- (Yr2:13) *“It means I don't need a part time job as well”*

It was interesting to note that the student responses identify many of the aims for the EMA put forward by the government (see Chapter Two), such as improved opportunity for student participation and retention based on funding allowing access and reducing the need for part-time employment (Kennedy, 1997). There were very few responses given by those students who believed that the EMA was not a good idea. Of the forty-seven responses received (5% of total response rate) on Year One and Year Two questionnaires, two themes emerged, which suggested that students did support the idea of financial support in education, but that it should either be universal in its application or that it should be available at higher education level, rather than further education level.

The EMA is unfair, because it is means tested:

(Yr 2:196) *“I don't receive it which is completely unfair, my parents may earn more but they couldn't possibly afford to give me £30 a week”*

(Yr1:75) *“Unfair to others, for parents who earn just over boundary of £30,000”*

The EMA is not as important as a university grant:

(Yr1:574) *“Why pay people to go to college and remove grants at universities. Not while means tested”*

(Yr2:40) *“I think it would be better to give money to university students and it should be tested better to work out who should receive it, I also think that a lot of people who receive it would have come to college anyway and they tend to have same absence levels but make up better excuses and use the money for going out and buying baccy”*

It is also interesting to note that a small number of positive responses to this question in both Year One and Two (EMA and non-EMA recipients Year Two) also identified the issue of means testing, suggesting that a small proportion of students believe that the EMA should be available to all students and thereby not realising the social justice element of the EMA aim (DfES, 2002a):

(Yr1:422) *“ Students who might not have been able to study in further education due to expenses can now gain qualifications, but should not be means tested should be universal regardless of salary”*

(Yr2:62) *“Yes it encourages attendance. But I feel that all students should receive EMA and I am aware that the income of parents does not necessarily filter down to the children. Further if it is meant to encourage attendance then surely it should be extended to all students.”*

The responses examined from the student interviews support the suggestion raised by the student questionnaire analysis, that students at South West College have identified many of the government aims for the EMA without solicitation. In response to question 3 ‘In what ways has receiving the EMA affected you as a student?’ students commented on how the EMA had allowed them to:

Pay for transport to college²⁰:

Interviewer: *“In what way has receiving EMA affected you as a student?”*

Student 38: *“Well definitely with the travel support, that’s helped me.”*

Afford education resources and excursions:

I: *“... So in what way has receiving EMA affected you as a student?”*

Student 18: *“Um... well, I’ve been able to do more like college activities and stuff, go for days out and stuff and go on trips, like we went to France and stuff. Been able to do a lot more of that.”*

Not have to undertake part-time employment:

I: *“So in what way has EMA affected you as a student?”*

Student 22: *“Well, it’s just given me a lot more independence. It means I don’t have to work or anything and that’s quite handy. I mean I’ll still work in the summer, but I’ll still be able to get work experience and everything, but I don’t have time in the term time cause I don’t get home until six cause I live quite a way away from the college. So it means my parents don’t have to shell out for me, it’s made life a lot easier really.”*

Overall, the majority of student responses in both the questionnaires and interviews suggest that students at South West College think that the EMA is a good idea for the same reasons as those identified by the literature (see Chapter Two):

I: *“Would you like to make any final comments about EMA?”*

Student 41: *“I think it’s a very good scheme, because you get lots of people who find it hard to afford to do everything through the college. I think it’s quite fair as well, because it’s on what your parents earn so therefore if your parents earn over a certain amount you don’t get it, which I think is fair enough.”*

College staff also identified many of the government aims for the EMA. The Director of Studies held a clear perception of what the governments was aiming to do through the introduction of the EMA – the attainment of national education and training targets:

²⁰ South West College is placed in a rural location and consequently transport is an important issue for students considering further education.

- I: *So what would you actually say, in your opinion, that the aims of the government were in introducing an incentive that was financial for further education students?*
- DS: *Well I think you encourage the greater achievement of the national education and training targets which is dependent on more young people getting involved in full time education and training. It's also at a time where the economy is thriving and compared with the recent past and at times such as this there is a danger that more young people will be going straight into work without the foundation of educational training.*

The Director of Studies justified her belief that the EMA was a good idea for similar reasons as the students, such as improved attendance, less need to take on part-time work, rewarding achievement and generally providing an incentive to study. She also identified a positive outcome of the EMA that may have been unintended by the government – money management. Students have to open up their own bank account in order to receive payments. The Director of Studies recognised the importance of this as a basis for good personal financial management in the future:

- I: *Excellent. Any final comments you would like to make on the EMA?*
- DS: *In relation to the EMA, well I just think it's a really good thing, you know, it provides incentive to young people, it rewards their attendance, it rewards their achievement. At the same time I would fully support the model in ***** where the EMA is paid directly to the students concerned, because the other factor is that they have to have a bank account and they've got to manage their money as well. They've also got to take responsibility for accounting when their absent. I think that does set a really good foundation for their future education. If they are going on to university, if they get into the practice of having to say if their going to be absent, having to justify that, but also having to manage their finances at an early stage, I mean that's got to be good for the future.*

The responses of tutors, when asked what the best possible outcome of providing a financial incentive to students in post-16 education at the college might be, reflected the positive feelings of the students and Director of Studies. Tutors identified increased opportunities for students to participate and succeed on their chosen course/s, which would provide them with better career opportunities (social inclusion):

- I: *“What do you believe could be the best possible outcome of providing a financial incentive to students in post-16 education at *****?”*
- Tutor 5: *“Better retention, participation, achievement and access to FE.”*

- I: *“What do you believe could be the best possible outcome of providing a financial incentive to students in post-16 education at *****?”*

Tutor 6: *“That students continue their education and leave with either a qualification or better equipped to gain employment.”*

I: *“What do you believe could be the best possible outcome of providing a financial incentive to students in post-16 education at *****?”*

Tutor 8: *“That student’s can continue their education without the worry of finance, having to get a job, inhibiting their progress. To improve attendance and achievement from a college perspective.”*

By identifying the potential outcomes of the EMA, and reasons for why the EMA is a good, it suggests that college staff and students have a clear perception of many of the aims established by the government for the EMA.

Theme 2 - The Effectiveness of the EMA

Student Participation in FE

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the EMA on student participation in South West College, question C8 ‘Did the possibility of receiving the EMA influence your decision to stay on in post-16 education?’ addressed the issue directly. By identifying the potential outcomes of the EMA, it suggests a clear perception among college staff of the aims. The question was asked to Year One students only to establish whether the EMA was a factor in the students’ decision to go to college after Year 11. It was not asked to Year Two students of the same 1999 cohort, because the issue of participation in post-16 education had been examined in Year One, while feelings and attitudes on this subject were still relatively fresh in the students’ minds (suggesting a more honest response).

Table 12: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Did the possibility of receiving the EMA influence your decision to stay on in post-16 education?’.

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	97	25.7	25.7
No	233	61.8	87.5
Not Sure	39	10.3	97.9
No Response	8	2.1	100
Total	377	100	

The majority of EMA recipient students did not believe that the EMA had affected their participation in further education (Table 12). 62% of EMA recipient students stated that the possibility of receiving a financial incentive to stay on at College had no influence on their decision to remain in education. However, 26% of respondents claimed that knowledge of the EMA had affected their participation in further education (10% were not sure).

Responses to questions C4 demonstrated that 71% of EMA recipient students were aware of the EMA before starting college. Therefore the 26% of respondents who claimed that the EMA had influenced their decision to stay on at College were knowledgeable of the EMA and must form part of the 71% who were aware of the EMA before starting college. Consequently, it could be suggested that 39% of EMA recipients who were informed about the EMA prior to starting college would have continued into further education regardless of any financial incentive.

Question 2 of the student interviews, ‘In what ways did the EMA affect your decision to go on to a full-time course in further education?’, also addressed the issue of student participation directly. All respondents stated that the EMA had not affected their decision to attend college after Year 11, demonstrating that the perceived effect of the EMA on participation was less than that reported in the student questionnaire. The themes that emerged from the interview data for this question suggest that students were either:

Unaware of the EMA before starting college and therefore the grant did not affect their decision to go on to full-time further education (supporting the findings on student awareness identified in questions C2/C3/I3/C4 and C5 of the student questionnaires and question 5 of the student interviews):

I: *“Okay in what way did EMA affect your decision to go on a full time course in further education?”*

Student 3: *“It didn’t affect mine at all, I actually found out about it when I started college so I actually knew I was going on a full time education course, and I didn’t think really there was much help in it, except for like my part time job, so it was a great help when I had it, but it took a long while to come to me. It took about 6 or 7 weeks before I actually got it but then you also got a great big backlog which was very handy (laughs)....”*

Or that they would have gone to college regardless of any financial incentive, because that is what they had planned to do:

I: *“And in what way has EMA affected your decision to go on a full time course in further education?”*

Student 22: *“It hasn’t affected my decision at all, I mean I was definitely going to do ‘A’ Levels anyway when I found out about it. I thought yeah go for that I can always use the money, but I was definitely going to do the ‘A’ Levels I was doing anyway at this college.”*

The data examined for this question suggests that the EMA had no effect on student participation for the 1999 EMA recipient student cohort. However, this contradicts the data examined for question C8 of the Year One student questionnaire for that cohort, in that 26% of EMA recipients claimed that the EMA had affected their decision to stay on in further education. On further examination, and with reference to question C4, the data indicates that 39% of EMA recipients in the 1999 student cohort questionnaire, who were informed about the EMA prior to starting college, would have continued into further education regardless of any financial incentive. This data supports the findings of the interviews, that students with or without knowledge of the EMA would have participated in further education, however, it still challenges the perception that the EMA recipient students had not been influenced by the potential receipt of a grant and raises questions of reliability when comparing data from two different samples of the same population.

It is interesting to note that despite the lack of influence of the EMA on initial participation in further education, many of the EMA students interviewed believed that the EMA (requiring full attendance to receive the weekly allowance) had had a direct effect on their attendance and participation (retention) in college activities once at college.

I: *“In what ways did the EMA affect your decision to go on to a full-time course in further education?”*

Student 7 *“...it (EMA) has made it a lot easier because my parents haven’t got a lot of money and they couldn’t afford the bus fare cause if you pay...yeah it helped me go on an art trip that I really wanted to go on. It helped with my art work and also a lot of art equipment that I needed and also a couple of books and things...basically it’s really helped because my parents haven’t*

got a lot of money and I get the full £30 and it does help with my transport and my art like supplies and things yeah."

I: *"Would you have left if it hadn't been for the EMA?"*

Student 3: *"I don't think I would have left but I think my attendance would have been a lot lower and I wouldn't have learnt as much at all."*

Unlike the majority of the student respondents, the Director of Studies believed that the introduction of the EMA had had a direct effect on student participation in the college. In relation to student participation in post-16 education, the Director of Studies did not make a statement to support her original comment on the EMA's direct effect on student participation. Instead she commented on the amount of variables that can affect students being able to attend college, such as the rural nature of the case study location and how that affects post-16 opportunities and transport arrangements. This awareness of the way in which students make choices about whether to continue in education after Year Eleven fits well with the student perceptions collected by the researcher for the 1999 student cohort and the college statistical data, in that participation rates at South West College were not affected by the introduction of the EMA (Table 3)

Six tutors responded during interview that student participation had been positively affected by the EMA; however, their interpretation of participation was that of attendance, rather than participation in further education after Year Eleven. For this reason their responses should not be compared to other data collected on participation, but offered as recognition of the important effect the EMA is perceived to have on improving student attendance:

Tutor 9: *"It (EMA) encourages some students to be careful about their attendance."*

As suggested previously, an analysis of South West College data on student participation demonstrated a decrease in participation in the year that the EMA was introduced. A comparison of participation rates between the 1997 non EMA student cohort and the 1999 EMA student cohort was conducted, which demonstrated that there was a small decrease in student participation between 1997 and 1999 for students entering full-time advanced level courses, with numbers falling from 905 to 902 (Table 3). The Director of Studies stated in her interview (Appendix Fi) that access to South West College was not an issue that would be affected by the EMA and that parents had told her that the EMA would make no

difference to student participation. She suggested that South West College had always supported student participation and 'had a relatively good track record of getting students in'. Therefore it appears reasonable to suggest in relation to the aims of this case study that despite the introduction of the EMA student participation had not been affected in South West College. This may have been because it was a new initiative and, as data from the case study indicated (C2/C3/I3/C4 and C5 of the student questionnaires and question 5 of the student interviews) many students were not fully aware of it at its inception.

Student Retention in FE

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the EMA on student retention in South West College, question C12/I9 of the student questionnaires 'Has the EMA had a direct effect on your staying on your course in the College?' addressed the issue directly. This question was asked to both Years One and Two EMA recipients in the 1999 student cohort. The question was designed to elicit information on student perception in relation to the effect of the EMA on retention. Both Years One and Two were asked this question to see if their perception of this issue had changed over two years. The responses of the students in both years were very similar. In Year One of the 1999 cohort 24% of EMA recipients stated that the EMA had had a direct effect on their decision to stay on their course at college, however 61% of students responded that it had not (Table 13).

Table 13: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question 'Has the EMA had a direct effect on your staying on your course in the College?'

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	92	24.4	24.4
No	230	61.0	85.4
Not Sure	38	10.1	95.4
No Response	17	4.5	100
Total	377	100	

Table 14: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the question ‘Has the EMA had a direct effect on your staying on your course in the College?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	43	20.1	20.1
No	136	63.6.	83.6
Not Sure	17	7.9	91.6
No Response	18	8.4	100
Total	214	100	

In Year Two 20% of EMA recipient students stated that the EMA had had a direct effect on their staying on their course in college, but 64% responded that it had not (Table 14). Therefore the data collected for this question suggest that the majority of EMA recipient students in the 1999 cohort do not believe that the EMA has had a direct effect on their staying on their course in college.

During the student interviews question 3 ‘In what ways has receiving the EMA affected you as a student?’ saw students raise the issue of retention. Most students agreed that the EMA had not had an effect on their decision to stay on their course in college once enrolled:

I: *“Would you have left college if it wasn’t for EMA do you think?”*
 Student 18: *“Um... no not really, I enjoy the course.”*

I: *“So would you leave if you didn’t get EMA?”*
 Student 16: *“No I wouldn’t, cause I want to go on and get my degree so I need my ‘A’ levels.”*

Therefore the data collected for this case study suggest that the majority of EMA recipient students in the 1999 cohort did not believe that the EMA has had a direct effect on their staying on their course in college. However, the responses examined for the interview did identify three respondents who believed that the EMA had had some effect on retention, which suggests that if the EMA encourages even a few students to stay on their course until the end, then it is having a positive effect on student retention. Also, as noted

previously, the themes generated by student responses to the question of how the EMA had affected them as a student suggested that the EMA had several positive effects for full-time students on advanced level courses in South West College. These positive effects include a greater motivation to attend lessons, more money available to pay for transport to college, an incentive to stay on at college, more money to pay for subject resources and/or educational visits that are necessary for the course and less need for part-time employment during the college week. In relation to the aims of this case study, these positive outcomes perceived by the students in relation to the EMA suggest that staying at college was made easier by the EMA, therefore retention levels should be increased for the 1999 student cohort.

The Director of Studies was very aware of the statistical information collected by the college on student retention rates and was keen to discuss this as a positive effect of the EMA in the interview. She cited the college statistics on student retention for Year One of the 1999 student cohort (table 10) to emphasis the improvement for the new EMA cohort:

I: *Thank you, so bringing it closer to home (focusing on South West College) then would you say that the EMA has had any direct effect on either student participation, student retention or student achievement?*

DS: *Yes I think quite definitely, if you look at our statistics within the College you will see that there has been an improvement in student retention during the last year. It's always difficult to identify the variable factors and then really identify what is specifically responsible, but it does coincide with the introduction of the EMA and therefore we have to consider that as one of the important factors that could have influenced retention.*

The Director of Studies' belief that the EMA had had a direct effect on the college's improved retention figures is only partly supported by student perceptions, but the small number of students who stated that the EMA had affected their decision to stay on their course may be significant enough to improve the college retention figures.

The issue of student retention was also identified by the Director of Studies as the 'best possible outcome' of the EMA for the college. She stated that the EMA presented a form of national recognition for the value of further education in society by providing financial support for those students that needed it. This support provided more than just access to post-compulsory education (which is important based on student perceptions that most of

them would have gone to college regardless of the EMA), it enabled students to stay on their course rather than seek employment because of financial hardship (an issue identified by the students in qualitative responses). Overall, the EMA was seen to offer social inclusion, which could support the students' overwhelming belief that the EMA was a good idea:

DS: *I think probably the best outcome (of the EMA) is a recognition of the fact that we all value education and training for young people and that we value it so much that we're willing to reward it and also that we recognise that some young people have an incredible difficulty in sustaining that commitment. If they come from a situation of hardship where often the pressure is on them to earn money and sometimes, quite honestly, they can't afford the day to day cost of courses and therefore by giving them funding in a way which seems to be equitable i.e. it is means tested and more goes to the students who are in a greater situation of hardship, then I think that's got to be right.*

I: *So would I be correct in summing that up as, it provides access for students to an education which may not be accessible without that money?*

DS: *Yes, I think probably it's more than that, cause in my experience I think the access is probably perceived to be there and certainly within ***** had a relatively good track record of getting students in. What EMA does is enable them to stay once they are here...And also the other factor is that in the past we have had students starting courses, but because they have been in a situation of hardship they've had to take on part time employment, which throughout the year has increased and it is increased to the extent that it does begin to interfere with study. And I think there is a direct correlation between the number of hours that students work and the ability they have to undertake their independent study and assignment work related to the course.*

I: *So perhaps a better way to look at it is social inclusion - it allows them to be included within all the processes within the college. So it may not allow them access within the first instance, because they would have come anyway, but when they are here they can participate in courses fully.*

DS: *I think that's right, social inclusion is probably the best way of describing it overall, ensuring that they do continue to be included.*

In relation to student retention, only three tutors expressed during interview that the EMA had a direct effect on keeping students in college. This is interesting because it supports both the overall student perceptions on retention (Tables 13/14) and college data (Table 9). Of the tutors who did believe that the EMA had a positive effect on student retention, two illuminated their statements by saying that it acted as an incentive, supporting those in need of financial assistance:

Tutor 1: *“Somewhat – it is (EMA) quite a big carrot.”*

Tutor 9: *“It (EMA) possibly assists for the very poorest students.”*

The tutors who believed that the EMA did not improve student retention were reluctant to offer reasons for this belief, fearing that their ideas may be wrong. However, one tutor stated that employment offered a greater financial incentive for poorer students than the EMA:

I: *“Do you believe that the EMA has had any direct effect on student retention in the college?”*

Tutor 2: *“No, the major motivator to stay at college has to be intrinsic or career driven. Wages outside of college are higher than the EMA.”*

This was a very interesting comment, because it challenges one of the government’s long-term aims of the EMA – to improve the skills of the workforce through widening participation and therefore support economic and social development. Tutor 2 identified one of the fundamental problems with adopting a structural approach to widening participation in further education – financial reward alone (extrinsic motivation) may not act as an incentive to all potential students, because cultural factors also act upon individual decisions too. Another tutor (Tutor 7) supported this theory when he commented that *“I do not think that you can change students’ attitudes with cash”*. Also, as Hutton (1996) stated, very few 16 year olds are aware of the future financial rewards that can be accrued through deferring employment in favour of further and/or higher education. Therefore the temptation of employment and immediate financial reward may supersede any incentive offered by a less financially lucrative EMA.

In relation to student retention and the effect of the EMA, it may be suggested that the EMA may have some positive impact on retention,. Question C12/I9 of the student questionnaires demonstrated that just over 20% of students in both years identified the EMA as a positive influence on retention. The data examined for questions C8/I6 did not support this suggestion, however an examination of college data for both the 1997 (non-EMA) and 1999 (EMA) student cohorts (Table 9), shows that retention had improved after one year of the 1999 student cohort by 4.65% and by the end of Year Two, although lower, had still increased by 2.65% compared to the 1997 student cohort. It should be noted that this increase in retention may not be attributable to the introduction of the EMA; however

it was the only known extrinsic factor (excepting different form tutors) that had changed between the 1997 and 1999 student cohort.

Student Achievement in FE

Question C11/I8 ‘Has the EMA had a direct effect on your attendance at College?’ of the student questionnaires was asked to both Year One and year Two EMA recipient students in the 1999 cohort. This question was designed to elicit information on students’ perceptions in relation to the impact of the EMA on their attendance. Both Year One and Two were given this question to see if students’ attitudes changed over the course of the two years. It should be noted that the EMA is paid to eligible students who have 100% attendance and therefore it could be suggested that the EMA may act as an incentive for improved attendance. In relation to the aims of this case study, improved attendance may have an effect on achievement, in that greater attendance could result in the student having increased information at the very least.

In Year One of the 1999 student cohort, 52% of EMA recipients believed that the EMA had had a direct effect on their attendance, 32% responded that the EMA had not had a direct effect on their attendance and 13% were not sure (Table 15). In Year Two the data collected for this question were very similar, with 51% of EMA recipient students stating that the EMA had had a direct effect on their attendance, 29% responding that it had not and 11% were not sure (Table 16).

Table 15: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year One to the Question ‘Has the EMA had a direct effect on your attendance at College?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	194	51.5	51.5
No	121	32.1	83.6
Not Sure	47	12.5	96.0
No Response	15	4.0	100
Total	377	100	

Table 16: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Has the EMA had a direct effect on your attendance at College?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	110	51.4	51.4
No	63	29.4	80.8
Not Sure	23	10.7	91.6
No Response	18	8.4	100
Total	214	100	

The data for both years suggest that the EMA has had an effect on student attendance and that this may be reflected in the 1999 cohort achievement levels. However, it should be noted that many variables are known to affect student achievement and any comparative analysis between the 1997 student cohort and the 1999 student cohort accepts the rudimentary nature of any suggested impact of the EMA.

Question 3 ‘In what ways has receiving the EMA affected you as a student?’ of the student interviews generated varied responses, but included the theme of attendance. In relation to attendance, the students that commented on this did not agree on whether or not the EMA had improved their attendance. Some students believed that their attendance had improved as a direct consequence of the EMA, because standard and bonus payments are linked to 100% college attendance:

- I: *“Good, in what way has receiving EMA affected you as a student?”*
- Student 6: *“Um, I come to college more.”*
- I: *“So you’re attendance is better?”*
- Student 6: *“Yeah much better, I have to come.”*
- I: *“Okay has it made it easier for you to attend?”*
- Student 6: *“Yeah, cause I did go through a bit of a phase of missing quite a few of my lessons, but I got quite worried about losing my money, so I haven’t actually missed any since I got my EMA, so it’s made me a lot more motivated and work a lot harder.”*

Other students felt that their attendance had not been affected by the EMA:

I: *“Okay, so in what way has receiving EMA affected you as a student? Has it made your attendance better? Would you have left without it, or anything like that?”*

Student 11: *“I don't think it's changed me much. I'd have still come to college, I don't think I'd have skived any lessons anyway just because I don't want to fail my exams really. But I suppose it is the bonus at the end that is pretty nice just for attendance.”*

And one student was not sure:

I: *“In what has EMA affected you as a student? Has it made your attendance better?”*

Student 39: *“Not really I don't feel that the actual... my attendance would improve ... cause I still miss out, not really being bothered, even though £30.00 is a lot of money and, um, I think it sometimes, when I need it quite badly, I do make sure I attend every lecture and come in when I'm not well, when I'm ill, just, but not really the only reasons. It's not a major influence not majorly, it's just if I fall behind I have to go back and catch up on work so.”*

The majority of students interviewed responded to question 4 ‘Can you think of any ways in which the EMA may affect your success on the course?’ that the EMA had affected their success on their course in some way. The main reason given for improved academic success was increased attendance at lectures. Students appeared very aware of a connection between regular attendance and better results during and at the end of the course:

I: *“Can you think of any way in which EMA may affect your success on the course?”*

Student 22 *“Well attendance mainly, taking more stuff I probably will pass. I wouldn't have passed if I didn't get the money, probably.”*

I: *“So can you think of any ways in which EMA may affect your success on the course?”*

Student 21 *“I think it would make me more willing to go to lectures, which would, in effect, give you more interest in lectures and then you should learn more and then be able to cope with assignments and exams.”*

Several students identified the EMA as a motivating factor generally, in that the money to be attained if attendance and performance criteria were met motivated them to go to college:

- I: *“Can you think of any way in which EMA may affect your success on the course?”*
- Student 7: *“Makes you try harder if you think you’re going to get a bonus if you get higher grades.”*

An examination of data for both years of the student questionnaire and the student interviews suggest that students believe that the EMA has had an effect on their attendance and that this may be reflected in the 1999 cohort achievement levels, based on the perception that greater attendance results in increased knowledge.

Tutor perceptions of the EMA’s effect on student attendance was far less positive than the students’. Tutor comments cited negative experiences of the EMA in relation to student participation in lessons. There was a general belief among tutors that students were ‘working the system’ by not attending, but were still receiving their weekly EMA cheque. It has not been possible to compare attendance figures in the case study for the 1997 and 1999 student cohorts, because the college did not have a rigorous attendance monitoring system before the introduction of the EMA.

It is interesting to note that the Director of Studies identified in her interview an outcome from the introduction of the EMA that had a positive, but unintended consequence on the college systems – monitoring of attendance. The students, from the very first discussion group, identified that attendance was a key issue surrounding the EMA, in that 100% attendance was necessary for the attainment of the grant. The college did have a system of monitoring attendance, but that system had to become much more rigorous to accommodate the criteria of attendance for the EMA. The Director of Studies felt that the introduction of this more rigorous attendance system benefited the college, students and the consortium of colleges in the county, a perception shared by many of the student respondents in the case study (tables 15/16).

The tutor interviews raised the issue that all tutors perceived that the aim of the EMA is to improve attendance, which is interesting considering that rigorous attendance monitoring was really introduced as a means to an end, rather than as an outcome in itself. Regular attendance was believed to offer improved chances of higher achievement for students.

However, everybody questioned for this case study, students, Senior Management and tutors all identified that the EMA did have an effect on attendance.

In order to further investigate the effectiveness of the EMA on student achievement in South West College, question I10 ‘Has the EMA had a direct effect on your achievement levels at the College?’ of the student questionnaire addressed the issue directly. This question was only asked of Year Two EMA recipient students in the 1999 cohort, because achievement on advanced level courses can only be recorded on completion, which takes two years. The question was designed to elicit information on student perception in relation to the impact of the EMA on their achievement, based on modules and examinations already taken as part of their two year academic or vocational course. Only 14% of EMA recipient students in the 1999 cohort believed that the EMA had had a direct effect on their achievement levels, 62% responded that the EMA had not affected their achievement and 16% were not sure (Table 17).

Table 17: Responses of the 1999 Student Cohort Year Two to the Question ‘Has the EMA had a direct effect on your achievement levels at the College?’

	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	29	13.6	13.6
No	132	61.7	75.2
Not Sure	35	16.4	91.6
No Response	18	8.4	100
Total	214	100	

The data examined suggest that students’ perceptions of the introduction of the EMA are that it has had very little impact on their own achievement levels. However, the fact that 14% of students believed that the EMA had had a positive effect on their achievement, may have suggested that college data would demonstrate an increase in the achievement rate between the 1997 (non-EMA) and 1999 (EMA) cohorts.

The Director of Studies claimed in her interview that the EMA had had a direct effect on achievement, however during the interview the Director of Studies’ comments were more

cautious, stating that the EMA was not the only variable that might affect student outcomes, although she did suggest a cautious comparison of college data to assess the impact of the EMA on achievement:

- I: *And achievement. I think perhaps it's a little early to tell isn't it because...*
DS: *Yes it certainly is. The only benchmark I think you could look at would be the possible achievement of AS²¹ and possibly one year intermediate courses. And look at last year's completion compared with the previous years. But again a word of caution, it does vary so much, year on year, it's not a good firm indicator.*
I: *Which is why perhaps we've been looking at a two year cohort taking into account that effect?*
SB: *That's right, yeah.*

The tutor interviews suggested the same mixed response toward EMA and its effect on achievement that had been demonstrated by the other respondents within the case study. Only three tutors interviewed felt that the EMA had any direct effect on student achievement, but only one of these tutors offered a reason for this, citing increased student attendance as potentially improving performance, a factor also identified by students (tables 13/14) and the Director of Studies:

Tutor 2: *"...I suspect that those students whose attendance will have been affected i.e. stopped skiving (by the EMA), then it will help. In other words, they should achieve their predicted grades."*

Of the tutors who stated that the EMA did not have any direct effect on student achievement, only one tutor chose to offer a reason, a reason based on cultural/social factors:

Tutor 9: *"The EMA has had no effect on achievement, as this is more linked to personal motivation and hard work."*

This is an interesting comment, because it supports the belief that cultural factors and intrinsic motivation are important in influencing educational success (See Chapter Two).

An analysis of college data on student achievement collected between 1997 – 2001, representing a non-EMA cohort of students and an EMA cohort, suggested that there had

²¹ AS refers to Advanced Subsidiary GCE examination.

been no real increase in achievement levels for course completers on advanced level courses (Table 18). The 1997 student cohort (non-EMA) had an achievement level of 93.52%, compared to a level of 93.56% for 1999 student cohort (EMA), a difference of 0.04%. An examination of the perceptions of students and staff in the 1999 cohort supports a suggestion that student achievement in South West College had not changed despite the introduction of the EMA. This further suggests that if all other variables for the 1997 and 1999 cohorts were the similar (as suggested by the Director of Studies in her interview), then the effectiveness of the EMA in improving student achievement at South West College had been negligible. This said, the majority of students within the case study perceived the EMA to have had an effect on their attendance, which they believed may have a beneficial impact on their course outcomes.

Table 18: College Student Achievement Level for All Further Education Students Successfully Completing Full-time Advanced Level Courses That Started in 1997 and 1999.

	1997 – 1999 Non EMA cohort Achievement Level (% of students successfully completing two year advanced level course)		1999 – 2001 EMA cohort Achievement Level (% of students successfully completing two year advanced level course)
August 1999	93.52%	August 2001	93.56%

The aim of this case study has been to investigate the effect of the EMA on participation, retention and achievement for young people from low-income households on full-time advanced level academic and vocational courses in South West College. The data collected and analysed for the case study suggest that student and staff have awareness of the aims of the EMA and perceptions of its effectiveness in meeting those aims. The findings also suggest that further education funding for students at South West College may have some effect on improving student retention, but that student participation and achievement were unaffected by the introduction of the EMA

The following Chapter discusses the research findings through a re-examination of the literature reviewed and the data analysed for the case study. A discussion of student participation, retention and achievement will take place in light of the data analysed for the case study and the theoretical issues that emerged from the sociological examination of educational inequality. Research limitations will be identified and modifications explored. The outcomes of the research will be examined. The unfolding thesis of the research will be summarised. A number of recommendations for further research that have arisen as a consequence of this case study will be made.

Chapter Five – Discussion

In this chapter the findings of the case study, based on 583 Year One and 363 Year Two completed student questionnaires (946 total questionnaire responses in the 1999 student cohort); 43 student semi-structured interviews in Year One, 11 tutor semi-structured interviews in Year Two and 1 Director of Studies semi-structured interview in Year Two (55 semi-structured interviews conducted in total for the 1999 cohort); a discussion group of 32 students in Year One of the 1999 cohort; 24 completed comment sheets by tutors in Year One of the 1999 cohort and a comparison of four years of college data on student participation, retention and achievement for the 1997 and 1999 cohorts, are summarised and their relationship shown to the key issues arising from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 under headings pertinent to the aims of the research. The aims of this case study were to investigate the effect of the EMA on student participation, retention and achievement in full-time further education advanced level vocational and academic courses for young people from low-income households in South West College; and to examine relevant literature in order to identify the extent to which a financial incentive could improve post-16 participation, retention and achievement.

“The impact of EMA on participation, retention and achievement rates in post-compulsory education remains a critical measure of the success of the initiative.” (Maguire et al., 2002, p. 47)

The research questions addressed in this study were: What is an EMA? Why was the EMA developed? What are the aims of the EMA? Will the EMA be effective in meeting its aims?

Summary of Findings

The case study investigated the effect of the EMA on student participation, retention and achievement in South West College in 1999 - 2001. Effect was measured in terms of student and staff perceptions in relation to the EMA and a change in student participation, retention and achievement data between two cohorts (1997 non-EMA and 1999 EMA). The findings suggested that the introduction of the EMA had not affected student participation or achievement in South West College, but student retention had increased.

Data examined from the student questionnaires suggested that just over half of students in the 1999 cohort were aware of the EMA before starting college and that the majority of

students understood what the EMA entitled them to. This knowledge should have allowed them to make a conscious decision about the impact of the EMA on their choice to continue into further education. However, when questioned on this the majority of EMA recipient students did not believe that the EMA had affected their participation in further education (Table 5). This belief was reinforced by the responses examined from the student interviews, with students stating that the EMA had not had any effect on their decision to participate in further education.

However, the data examined for question C8 of the Year One student questionnaire demonstrated that 26% of EMA recipients claimed that the EMA *had* affected their decision to stay on in further education. On further examination, and with reference to question C4, the data indicate that 39% of EMA recipients in the 1999 student cohort questionnaire, who were informed about the EMA prior to starting college, would have continued into further education regardless of any financial incentive. These data support the qualitative findings of the interviews, that students with or without knowledge of the EMA would have participated in further education; however, it still challenges the perception that the EMA recipient students had not been influenced by the potential receipt of a grant, despite a reduction in the number of students participating in college in the 1999 cohort. As stated previously, other factors may have acted upon enrolment figures for that year.

It is interesting to note that despite the limited influence of the EMA on initial participation in further education, many of the EMA students questioned and interviewed believed that the EMA (requiring full attendance to receive the weekly allowance) was a good idea and had had a direct effect on their attendance and participation in activities once at college. Just over half of the tutors interviewed believed that attendance had been improved by the EMA (despite comments to the contrary in Year One) and the Director of Studies supported this further. Therefore it could be claimed that one of the unintended consequences of this policy has been to focus college and student attention on the issue of attendance and consequentially improve student attendance through the policy criteria imposed.

In relation to the EMA's impact on widening student participation in South West College, it is suggested that although there was a slight decline in participation rates for the EMA cohort, a minority of students believed that the EMA had affected their decision to participate in further education, a belief that staff in the 1999 cohort failed to comment on clearly. Therefore, assuming that the Director of Studies was correct in her assumption that, in South West College at least, access to education had not been a problem in the past, then a small rise in participation may have been expected based on the positive student statements. However, this was not evidenced in the college data and consequently the effect of the EMA on participation at South West College remains questionable.

An analysis of South West College data on student participation demonstrated a decrease in participation in the year that the EMA was introduced. A comparison of participation rates between the 1997 non-EMA student cohort and the 1999 EMA student cohort identified a small decrease in student participation between 1997 and 1999 for students entering full-time advanced level vocational and academic courses, with numbers falling from 905 to 902 (Table 3).

Both student and staff had mixed response toward the effect of the EMA on retention. Some thought it would increase student retention for the most disadvantaged students and others thought it would have little or no impact at all. Question C12/I9 of the student questionnaires demonstrated that just over 20% of students in both years of the 1999 student cohort believed that the EMA had a positive influence on retention. The student interviews data suggested that the majority of EMA recipient students in the 1999 cohort did not believe that the EMA has had a direct effect on their staying on their course in college. However, if the EMA encourages even a few students to stay on their course until the end, which the data collected from both the questionnaires and the interview suggested, then it is having a positive effect on student retention.

Students identified that the EMA motivated people to attend college (albeit extrinsically), helped with transport costs and educational resource costs (additional and indirect costs) (Herbert and Callender, 1997) and allowed them to participate in college without the need for a part-time job. In relation to the aims of this case study, these positive outcomes perceived by the students in relation to the EMA suggest that retention levels should be

increased for the 1999 student cohort, because they have greater financial support to attend college and participate in their courses fully than their 1997 student cohort counterparts who did not receive the EMA.

Although the majority of students who had applied for the EMA had received it successfully, data examined for both students and staff in the 1999 cohort identified that there were some problems associated with processing the EMA. Many students were keen to express concern about the way in which their payments had been delayed. This concern is important because it demonstrates that they understand the importance of regular payments to sustain full participation in college activities (retention) through the purchasing of resources to the payment of transport costs and food. Students were aware that a lump sum payment in lieu of missed regular payments may jeopardise their ability to stay on a course and/or may encourage them not to spend the money on educational needs. Therefore the late payment of the EMA has implications for student retention levels. If students do not get their EMA payments on time, it could result in them having to leave the course.

Most students, however, did not relate the EMA payment to staying on the course, as demonstrated by question 3 of the interviews and questions C12/I9 of the student questionnaires. This said, even if only a few students decided to remain at college because they knew that the EMA payment would eventually come through, then this could be seen as a positive step towards improving retention. Issues resulting in non-payment identified in Year One of the EMA had been greatly resolved by the second year. In relation to retention, the high level of student payment for the EMA should impact positively on students remaining on the course, particularly with increased efficiency of payment in the second year. In other words, the majority of students entitled to the EMA, in both Year One and Year Two, responded that payment was received; suggesting that lack of finance would not be a reason for leaving college before the course had finished.

In relation to the level of funding provided by the EMA, the data examined suggests that the majority of students receiving the EMA believed that it was a realistic level of funding to support their studies. In relation to the aims of this case study the data suggests that applications for the EMA should continue in South West College, because the level of

funding is seen as adequate in sustaining a course of study, which should impact positively on student retention.

Only three College tutors felt that the EMA had a direct effect on keeping students in college. This is interesting because it supports both the overall student perceptions on retention (Tables 13/14) and those of the Director of Studies, as well as the analysis of college data for both the 1997 (non-EMA) and 1999 (EMA) student cohorts (Table 9). This analysis suggested that retention had improved in Year One of the 1999 student cohort by 4.65% and by the end of Year Two, although lower, had still increased by 2.65% compared to the 1997 student cohort. It should be noted that this increase in retention may not be attributable to the introduction of the EMA; however it was the only known extrinsic factor (excepting different form tutors) that had changed between the 1997 and 1999 student cohort. It is also interesting to note that the national evaluation also found an increased levels of retention in Year One compared to Year Two (Maguire, 2002), suggesting that other factors affecting students' decision to stay on a course were impacting in Year Two.

The data examined from student questionnaires and interviews suggested that students' perceptions of the introduction of the EMA are that it has had very little impact on their own achievement levels. This said 14% of students in receipt of the EMA responded to question I10 of the Year Two questionnaire (Table 17) that they believed that the EMA had had a positive effect on their achievement. Students were very positive about the EMA and in findings from the student interviews, most students on full-time advanced level courses in South West College perceived the EMA as contributing positively to their academic success. However, success was seen more in term of retention issues i.e. being able to afford college resources and trips, take less part-time work and act as an incentive to attend more lessons, than in examination results (South West College measure of achievement at this time).

It is interesting to note that the Director of Studies in South West College identified an outcome from the introduction of the EMA that had a positive, but unintended consequence, that of attendance, a feature also identified by the national evaluation (Ashworth et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2002; Legard et al., 2001). The students, from the very first discussion group, identified that attendance was a key issue surrounding the

EMA, in that 100% attendance was necessary for the attainment of the grant. Increased attendance may imply greater levels of academic achievement; however it depends on the attitude of the student attending, as supported by a tutor in their interview. Students can attend more regularly, but still choose whether or not to engage in lessons.

Students and staff appeared to have different perceptions of the effect of the EMA on attendance in South West College. Tutors commented in Year One of the 1999 cohort that the EMA had not improved student attendance. Yet the findings of the student questionnaires and interviews for both years suggested that the students believed that the EMA had had a positive effect on attendance (Tables 15/16), a perception that would be expected to be reflected through increased college achievement levels for the 1999 student cohort if attendance was a factor impacting on achievement. Another interesting point that emerged from the tutor interviews on the increased attendance of students in receipt of the EMA was that it may have an unintended negative consequence for other students in the group. One tutor raised the issue that some of his students were attending lessons in order to receive their EMA, but had no interest in the subject and showed no interest in lessons. This was seen to have a disturbing effect on the other students who did want to learn:

Tutor 4: "I have experienced students who attend courses to receive EMAs and are not motivated in lectures. This has had an adverse effect on other more committed students."

The perceptions of students and staff in the 1999 cohort suggested that achievement levels may have shown a slight increase, based on the positive beliefs of some students in relation to both achievement and attendance. An analysis of college data on student achievement collected between 1997 – 2001, suggested that there had been no increase in achievement levels for course completers on advanced level courses (Table 18) since the introduction of the EMA to South West College. The 1997 student cohort (non-EMA) had an achievement level of 93.52%, compared to a level of 93.56% for 1999 student cohort (EMA), a difference of 0.04%.

It should be noted that this case study identified a difference in the effectiveness of the EMA based on student perceptions and the interpretation of college data. This difference may be a reflection of the complex issues that surround the case study, such as the cultural,

structural and subconscious factors that affect motivation, as well as a consequence of the data triangulation adopted to illuminate the case study. It is interesting to consider that the national evaluation of the EMA adopted a variety of data collection techniques and also identified different findings between studies (Ashworth et al., 2001; Legard et al., 2001; Heaver et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2002; Knight and White, 2003). The suggestion could be made that based on the complexity of evaluating the EMA, none of the studies (national evaluation and this case study) sufficiently account for the effect of the EMA, but when examined altogether the studies illuminate the success of the EMA.

Contextualising Practice

Widening Student Participation in FE

In 1999, the government introduced the pilot EMA based on reports by the FEFC (Kennedy, 1997), the PSI (Herbert and Callender, 1997) and the Lane Committee (DfEE, 1998b) that a system of student funding in further education would improve participation among students from low-income families. It appears that the new Labour government realised the potential of improved education and training opportunities for supporting the economic development of the United Kingdom. Rapid economic growth has been argued to be aided by a more highly skilled workforce (Callaghan, 1976; Kennedy, 1997; DfES, 2002a), although the previous Conservative government had not believed that any investment in post-compulsory education could be self-financing (Hutton, 1996). The Labour government has placed 'widening participation' in post-compulsory education firmly on the national agenda (Kennedy, 1997). In doing so it has attempted to emphasise the individual and social returns, such as increased income and social cohesion (DfEE, 1998), that greater qualifications bring. Through the introduction of the EMA the Labour government has presented an alternative to the individualistic approach of the previous Conservative governments and appeared to offer a challenge to social inequality and opportunities for increased participation in further education.

The EMA as policy appears to be based, theoretically, on the structural issue of student finance, rather than cultural, social, institutional, as well as structural, considerations. Educational inequality has been located within the inequality of the social structure (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). In other words, the inherent social inequality present in a capitalist system creates all other forms of social inequality, including educational

inequality (Marx, 1959; Parsons, 1951). The problem with this approach is that addressing the economic inequality in one social institution, in this case an education one, is unlikely to effect a change in the rest of society. Therefore for the government to claim that economic growth can benefit all (offer social justice) (DfEE, 1998) is unlikely, because inequality *is* the capitalist system (Althusser, 1968; Althusser and Balibar, 1966). The change offered by the EMA is to the structure of educational provision, not the structure of society, which remains capitalist and unequal.

Structural Neo-Marxists have accepted the difficulties with effecting change in the capitalist infrastructure and would realise the impact of increased capital on the social existence of students from low-income backgrounds in further education (Habermas, 1976). However, this said, cultural Neo-Marxists, such as Bourdieu (1977), Willis (1977) and McRobbie (1978), criticised a purely structural approach through the concept of 'cultural capital'. It was argued that socialisation establishes cultural norms and values, which in turn became the 'capital' with which young people entered education and society. Educational institutions are seen to value ruling class 'capital', resulting in any compensatory schemes, including extra financial support, being argued to be useless in the face of social class inequality. In terms of the EMA, according to this perspective it could possibly act as an incentive to learn, but once in further education all the cultural barriers to success will remain.

Other barriers to educational participation could also be explained from an Interactionist perspective. The concept of labelling identifies how people are treated differently based on the perception or 'label' others have of them. In education teachers have been shown to label students differently in terms of their ability to succeed and that this impacted on their educational success (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Rist, 1977; Hargreaves, 1967). In relation to the EMA, labelling theory suggests that students will already have a clear idea of their ability to succeed (or fail) in further education, which will affect their decision to participate. Having collected data from participating students in further education, it would be interesting to know how Year 11 pupils decided to participate, or not, in further education. The Director of Studies stated that access to the college (participation) had not been an issue in the past, but it would have been useful if this had been substantiated.

It may be suggested that a structural approach to educational inequality, such as the EMA, appears to offer an incentive to learn in further education. Offering money to young people from low-income households appears to challenge the economic inequality that may prohibit them from taking part in education after compulsory schooling ends. However, in South West College participation rates fell slightly for the EMA cohort, suggesting that participation had not been widened by the introduction of funding for advanced level students in the case study. It may be suggested that by choosing a policy that accepts structural notions of class inequality as the cause of educational inequality, the government have chosen to ignore the other potential causal factors that affect young people's choices about post-compulsory education, such as cultural background, labelling, institutional and organisational considerations, social relationships, motivation (West, 1996; Legard, et al., 2001). The cultural perspective should have offered an alternative perspective to the government for widening participation (Davies, 2000); however it does not appear to have been considered.

A reason for the lack of cultural input in the creation of the EMA could be the apparent success of the Australian AUSTUDY scheme. This scheme adopted a means-tested income support for full-time students in both further and higher education (Dearden and Heath, 1996), but failed to be mentioned in the Kennedy Report (1997). AUSTUDY demonstrates incredible similarities to the EMA and Dearden and Heath (1997) actually suggested the introduction of an 'education allowance' in the United Kingdom, based on the increases in participation seen in Australia for full-time students of low-income families. However, it seems that the increased student participation rates demonstrated by AUSTUDY should have been treated with caution when applied to the United Kingdom; because AUSTUDY was introduced at the same time as other forms of income support for unemployed teenagers were substantially reduced. In other words, perhaps the teenagers in Australia had little economic choice but to return to school.

In American studies of Community Colleges the effects of financial support on student enrolment (participation) demonstrated a positive relationship (St John and Noell, 1989; Leslie and Brinkman, 1987; St John, 1990; Somers and St John, 1993), particularly among low-income groups. However it should be noted that the education system in the United States is very different to that in the United Kingdom, enrolment/participation being based

on students paying their own fees. Therefore a comparative analysis of the two systems is not appropriate, but could have influenced the Kennedy Report (1997) through the research report provided on this area by Herbert and Callender (1997).

The Kennedy Report (1997) was commissioned to advise the government on ways of increasing student participation and success in post-compulsory education. The government stated in 1997 that it would 'remove barriers to learning' by introducing a new system of support for further education students (DfEE, 1998) and through the Lane Committee recommendations (DfEE, 1998b) introduced the pilot scheme of the EMA in 1999. At all times in the five year 'run up' to the EMA the government was receiving reports that financial support for full-time students in further education should result in increased student participation (Kennedy, 1997; Herbert and Callender, 1997). Therefore, intended or unintended consequences of a structural policy aside, it was not surprising that an Education Maintenance Allowance offering a financial incentive to prospective full-time further education students was introduced by the government in the light of the 'widening participation' agenda.

It would appear from the case study data that a financial incentive for further education student participation was also perceived by the students as 'a good idea'. In the discussion group that took place at the beginning of the case study, the notion of the EMA as a good idea was raised by students who felt that it had a positive contribution to make to their experience in further education. Following on from this perception raised by the students, Year One and Year Two students in the 1999 cohort were asked in the student questionnaire whether the EMA was a good idea, to which 91% EMA recipients in both years responded 'yes'. The reasons given to justify their belief that the EMA was a good idea were that it forced students to attend college; it helped with travel expenses, buying equipment for courses and funding college trips, as well as removing the pressure to undertake part-time employment. These themes (themes that were echoed in the student interviews) were voiced by a large majority of the EMA recipient student population and suggest that the general student perception of the EMA was similar to that of the government. Both appear to believe that the EMA could widen participation by removing financial barriers to learning, despite the fact that no empirical evidence existed to

demonstrate a link between student participation in further education and student funding (Kennedy, 1997; Herbert and Callender, 1997).

This said, it is clear from research on the cost of participating in a higher education course (Callender and Kempson, 1996) that similar expenses exist for further education students, but that access to funding had not been equitable (Herbert and Callender, 1997). The EMA was intended to address the 'funding lottery' (Herbert and Callender, 1997) of LEA discretionary awards for further education students from low-income backgrounds (access funds), offering a 'new and improved system of support' (DfEEa, 1998). However, the government was aware that 'the relationship between personal finance and education participation is not as simple as it may seem' (FEDA, 1999, p. 5), as Baroness Blackstone reported to Graham Lane, which the researcher would have expected to have led the government to investigate alternative strategies for widening participation. This has not been the case in further education.

Given the high expectation of success for the EMA, it was not surprising that based on preliminary national evaluation reports of the pilot EMA commissioned by the DfES (Ashworth et al., 2001; Ashworth et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2002), in 2002 the government decided to introduce a national EMA for September 2004 (DfES, 2002). The evaluation was both quantitative and qualitative and was undertaken by a consortium of research organisations led by CRSP utilising a variety of data collection techniques. The initial reports (Ashworth et al., 2001; Ashworth et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2002) had been very positive in relation to increased student participation in further education and appeared to support the value of funding in post-compulsory education for students from low-income families:

EMA has significantly raised post-16 full-time education participation among eligible young people in Year 12 by around 5.9 percentage points and for the combined eligible and ineligible population by around 3.7 percentage points. (Ashworth, et al. 2002, p. ii)

However student participation was seen to fall in the second year of the EMA national evaluation:

The most robust estimate of the EMA participation effect is obtained by combining data from both cohorts of young people, which gives an estimated participation impact of 5.9 percentage points. However, the estimated impact of EMA was larger amongst the first cohort of young people (7.9 percentage points) than amongst the second cohort (4.6 percentage points). It is not possible to state with any certainty whether this reflects chance differential year-on-year fluctuations in the staying on rates, as commonly occur (e.g. Maguire et al., 2001), or a change in the impact of EMA. Overall, just over one-half of young people encouraged into post-16 education by EMA would otherwise have gone into work and/or training, and just under one half would have been not in education, employment or training (NEET). (Ashworth, et al 2002, p.133)

Ashworth et al. (2001) noted that student participation increases failed to reach statistical significance in rural areas. These findings suggest, as with all social behaviour and attitudes, there are a number of complex variables that influence decision making and in the long term a financial incentive alone may not increase student participation rates.

Legard et al's. (2001) findings for the national evaluation suggested that young people decide to participate in further education based on intrinsic and extrinsic personal considerations. The evaluation also found that there had been a low awareness of the EMA amongst all young people during Year 11 offering little support for the EMA impacting on post-compulsory education participation, resulting in contradictory findings to those stated in Ashworth et al. (2001) and Maguire et al (2002). The effectiveness of the EMA in meeting its aims was suggested to be influenced by factors other than the student funding itself, such as student motivation (Knight and White, 2003), which supports the notion of cultural/social influences impacting on student participation, retention and achievement.

Hutton (1996) stated that very few 16 year olds are aware of the future financial rewards that can be accrued through deferring employment in favour of further and/or higher education. Therefore the temptation of employment and immediate financial reward may supersede any incentive offered by a less financially lucrative EMA (Davies, 2000). In a rural area of easily available unskilled employment, South West College is unlikely to compete against paid employment with the EMA offer of a £30 per week grant for students from low-income families, a concern voiced in the national evaluation:

There were mixed reactions about whether or not EMA had positively impacted on attendance and retention within schools and colleges. Responses in Leeds broadly suggested that a beneficial impact could be detected whereas in Inner London respondents were less sure about the effect of EMA, particularly because of the low take-up in this area and the fact that students could earn more from relatively well-paid part-time jobs. (Heaver et al. 2002, p. viii)

The sociological theory examined suggested that a structural approach to widening participation may not offer the most effective improvement to student participation and achievement in FE, a suggestion that appears to be supported by this case study and some findings from the national evaluation. The contradictions relating to EMA effectiveness that occur within the findings of this case study, and within the findings of the different studies that constitute the national evaluation (Ashworth et al., 2001; Legard et al., 2001; Heaver et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2002; Knight and White, 2003), appear to represent not only the complexity of data triangulation interpretation, but also the multifarious factors that affect motives to participate, stay in and succeed in further education. The suggestion could be made that, although difficult to interpret, the contradictions form part of a complex framework that open up findings and illuminate different insights of the EMA as a policy to support widening participation in FE.

Improving Student Retention in FE

The Widening Participation Committee was established in 1994, not only to advise the government on how to increase student participation in post-compulsory education, but also how to help students succeed (Kennedy, 1997). Part of this success would be measured by student retention figures, in other words how many students stayed on their course until completion. In the United States, studies implied that students from low-income families were less likely to complete their courses than those from higher classes (Mumper and Vander Ark, 1991; Carroll, 1989), although other variables have been seen to impact on retention in both the US and the UK (Velez, 1985; Sharpe, 1996; Medway and Penney, 1994; Page, 1996; Smith and Bailey, 1993; Davies, 1999). The EMA was put forward as a way to stop students dropping out because of financial pressures, this being seen as the main cause for poor retention (Callender and Kempson, 1996, Herbert and Callender, 1997).

Once students have decided to participate in further education, funding may support students from low-income backgrounds, allowing them to stay on their courses until the end. The national evaluation of the EMA appears to support this reasoning with empirical data:

Early indication from the findings from this part of the evaluation would suggest that the introduction of the EMA has had a positive effect in the pilot areas on levels of participation and retention in post-16 education. In particular, in the second year of the evaluation, respondents pointed to improved levels of retention among EMA students. (Maguire, 2002, p. 47)

However, studies conducted on student retention in further education have argued that financial reasons for non-completion of courses are not the main concern of students (Smith and Bailey, 1993). This suggests that although the financial position of students may impact on their decision to stay on a course, the structural factor is only part of a wider set of factors affecting student retention. Consequently the overall impact of the EMA on increasing student retention may be relatively small.

There is no doubt that capitalist society is based on social inequality (Marx, 1954) and as the education system in the United Kingdom forms part of the capitalist superstructure it supports and reflects this inequality (Parsons, 1951; Bourdieu, 1977; Willis, 1977; McRobbie, 1978; Stanworth, 1983; Kennedy, 1997). The education system will never present equal opportunities to those from different social classes, or other differentiated groups, despite claims of a meritocratic education put forward by structural functionalists (Davis and Moore, 1945). In further education issues of access and participation are based on a set of complex variables, such as social class and cultural beliefs (Bourdieu, 1977) and labelling (Rosenthal and Jacobsen, 1968; Rist, 1977; Hargreaves, 1967), as well as financial inequalities. Therefore the decision to participate in further education is based on more than just structural/financial constraints. However, once a student has made the decision to continue into further education, financial issues may become a problem that jeopardises their ability to stay on that course. In this circumstance a financial discretionary award, such as the EMA, may help some students to stay on in FE.

It is in the government's and society's interest to keep students on further education courses once they have enrolled, because increased retention should lead to higher levels of achievement, which in turn should result in a more dynamic economy (Hutton 1996). Further education providers were made aware of the importance of student retention for the national economic agenda through the inclusion of student retention figures in the funding and inspection frameworks (Martinez, 1995). The Kennedy Report (1997) identified the inequity between student support in higher and further education, with two-thirds of the post-16 budget being spent on Universities in 1996 (Kennedy, 1997). It has been acknowledged that taking part in further education courses includes additional and indirect costs, such as transport and resources (Herbert and Callender, 1997), which may not have been considered by students who had already decided to participate. Students from low-income families may, therefore encounter financial difficulties once on the course, an issue identified by the primary research for this case study and by the Lane Committee (DfEE, 1998b) in its recommendations to the government for widening participation in further education.

The introduction of the EMA may have had an effect on the small increase in student retention at South West College, based on an analysis of student and staff perceptions and the theoretical analysis of sociological studies. The impact of this on the government's long-term aim of having a more highly skilled workforce to support rapid economic growth may be small, but present, and may increase the number of individuals with access to 'social capital' (Kennedy, 1997), a prerequisite for social cohesion and economic renewal (Kennedy, 1997).

Raising Student Equity and Achievement in FE

The success of the EMA as policy is linked to the equity it would provide for student funding, an equity that had not existed under the LEA discretionary award system (Herbert and Callender, 1997). The further education Student Support Advisory Group (Lane Committee) provided a set of recommendations (DfEE, 1998b) that included minimum entitlements for 16-19 year olds in full-time education for financial support to help meet the cost of transport and living costs. It is interesting to note that in South West College, transport and living costs were cited by students as areas in which the EMA was perceived as beneficial. Using the recommendations established by the Lane Committee, the EMA

was introduced as a pilot scheme in 1999 under a range of models to examine the complex relationship between finance and education participation (FEDA, 1999). It was hoped that the EMA, offering a fair (means-tested) system of funding, would support young people in achieving success in further education by removing the need to participate in part-time employment, or drop out of the education system to undertake full-time employment (Kennedy, 1997).

Improved levels of student achievement in further education have been implied to be synonymous with increased participation, attendance and retention (Kennedy, 1997). If more students continue into further education from Year 11 on full-time courses, stay on those courses until the end, have increased attendance while there, then the results should be more students completing courses with potentially better results. The Labour government in 1999, using evidence from the Kennedy Report (1997) and later the Lane Committee (1998b), argued that the EMA was a policy that could be used to address this issue of raising student achievement in further education.

As noted before any solution to social inequality based on structural changes alone, i.e. the creation of a means tested grant to allow students from poorer families to participate in continued education, negates the other many and varied factors that act upon individual behaviour to not only go on to further education and stay on a course, but to how well they do on the course while at college. Variables that influence student achievement are notoriously hard to measure, as many multi-level models have demonstrated (Hope, 1997); therefore to identify the impact of one variable, such as student funding, on student achievement is very difficult (which could account for the lack of empirical research in this area).

In South West College the introduction of the EMA did not appear to have any effect on student achievement levels. The national evaluation has not been able to speculate on the impact of the EMA on achievement rates:

At this stage, it is too early to report in detail about the influence of EMA on achievement rates, since most students undertake two year post-16 programmes. (Maguire, 2002, p. 47)

NFER (Morris et al., 2002) research argues that the equity of funding that was sought by the EMA to allow improved education success has not been achieved. In 2002 NFER reported that the EMA 'exacerbated' funding inequalities (Morris et al., 2002). Problems with the issue of equity in funding were also identified by students and staff in South West College. The process of applying for the EMA and the perceived injustices of the current system, all presented problems in accessing the money, a situation that offers little to support the ideal of widening participation and thereby improving levels of qualifications.

In terms of the EMA supporting the government's short-term aim of improving educational achievement in post-compulsory education for students from low-income families, in South West College it does not appear to have been effective. Achievement levels demonstrated no significant change between the 1997 non-EMA cohort and the 1999 EMA cohort of full-time advanced level students. In relation to the long-term aim of securing a more highly qualified workforce that can support rapid economic growth, the researcher would suggest that the EMA cannot affect this if the educational outcomes have not been improved since its introduction. It will be interesting to see the national evaluation's analysis of the impact of the EMA on achievement levels, which have yet to be reported. Government statistics on economic growth for the first three months of 2002 (2.5 years after the introduction of the EMA and time for the first advanced level student qualifiers to enter the workforce) showed that the economy had barely grown (ONS, 2002). The Office of National Statistics (2002) reported that UK gross domestic product (GDP) had increased by only 0.1% between January to March 2002, and had risen by only 1.1% over the year as a whole, which recorded its lowest growth since 1991. These figures suggest that rapid economic growth did not occur during the pilot programme of the EMA. It will be interesting to observe UK GDP after the national introduction of the EMA.

The findings of the case study suggested that the introduction of the EMA may have offered a means for improving student retention, but that student participation rates and student achievement levels appeared unaffected in South West College. These findings differ from the national evaluation results that identify increased levels of participation and retention, but have not commented on achievement:

The EMA was introduced with the joint aims of encouraging more young people, particularly from deprived backgrounds, into post-16

education, helping to keep them there and ensuring achievement. This report has shown that EMA has increased participation and retention in post-16 education, particularly amongst young people from low-income families. However, any conclusion about achievement must await the results of the next wave of interviews with young people. (Ashworth et al., 2002, p. 133)

The literature review examined sociological theory and applied existing studies to offer suggestions on the extent to which the EMA could improve post-16 participation, retention and achievement. The theoretical suggestion was that the structural basis of the EMA as policy would anticipate a failure in improving student participation and achievement, but may enable an increase in student retention. This critical evaluation of a structural approach to 'widening participation' in further education appears to be offered some support by the case study findings, although it must be remembered that the case study is small and confined to one institution piloting one model of the EMA.

Despite theoretical doubts of the effectiveness of the EMA, the students in South West College still perceived the EMA as a positive change to further education and an incentive to learn. When asked what the best possible outcome of providing means-tested funding to students in post-16 education at South West College, most tutors reflected the positive feelings of the Director of Studies by identifying increased opportunities for students to participate and succeed on their chosen course/s, which should provide them with better career opportunities (social capital). It seems that the staff and students within South West College support the aims of the government in introducing a financial incentive that, in Baroness Blackstone's words, 'is effective in widening participation and improving retention and achievement' (FEDA, 1999, p.5) and in doing so may be seen to be supporting greater social cohesion (DfEE, 1998). The problem remains, however, of whether the EMA will be effective in achieving the ultimate goal of rapid economic growth.

At no point during the research was a negative comment made about the EMA as a funding policy, which is an interesting reflection of the students', staff's and literature's positive regard for funding and education. Perhaps it was for this reason that none of the literature (Kennedy, 1997; DfEE, 1998b) offered an alternative approach to widening participation in further education. The challenge of this research stems from the researcher's inability to

accept the structural grounding of the EMA as the only way of improving educational inequality. The researcher found much opposition to any suggestion that the EMA may be ineffective, both within South West College and in the public arena (TES, 2000). Giving money to students, particularly in a climate where higher education funding has been effectively removed, appears to be accepted as positive, no questions asked. The researcher had questions about the EMA, which the aims of the research sought to answer.

The original contribution of this research to knowledge and practice (and possibly educational policy if the complex nature of student success in post-16 education is realised) is therefore located within the researcher's inability to accept student funding as the solution to widening participation in further education. This research has entered new territory by presenting a challenge to the possible effectiveness of the EMA as a grant that offers only financial support for improving student participation, retention and achievement.

The outcomes of this research are particularly significant in light of the new college funding criteria established for further education institutions by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in 2003 based on the government's policy, *Success For All* (DfES, 2002). From September 2003 all college funding for further education courses will be based on student 'success', which will include measures of all of the three factors examined within this research – student participation, retention and achievement. Consequently further education institutions will now be looking at ways to improve student numbers in all of these areas to ensure maximum funding. Therefore, the findings of this research appear to offer valuable information to managers of further education institutions, in that they should not rely on the EMA alone to improve student participation, retention and achievement. Other initiatives will have to be developed to increase student success, such as those suggested by Davies (1999), which involves improving the quality of academic provision, or Bourdieu (1977), which increase the students' cultural capital.

Based on sociological analysis the researcher did not accept that the EMA would act to widen participation in further education, and argued that the structural basis of the EMA appears inappropriate for attaining increased levels of student participation and achievement, although student retention may witness a moderate positive effect. A

structural Marxist approach puts forward that economic inequality is the cause of all social inequality and a re-organisation of capital will remove inequality. However, critical evaluation of this approach suggests that educational inequality, like all other aspects of social inequality, also has a cultural basis that exists alongside the structural factors. For this reason, any policy to widen participation in further education should be based on a set of complex variables that account for cultural factors, such as 'cultural capital', 'labelling' and student motivation, as well as structural factors.

The EMA, as a financial incentive only, appears unlikely to facilitate a change in the attitude of children in compulsory schooling toward entering post-compulsory education. It was suggested in Chapter Two (Motivation to Learn) that an individual's motivation for choosing to continue in further education was complex, being driven by intrinsic, extrinsic and even subconscious factors (West, 1996). Consequently student motivation to learn is very difficult to address, suggesting that the EMA is a small initiative sent to remedy a deeply rooted social inequality based on cultural and structural differentiation. However, it should be acknowledged that the EMA was perceived by students in the case study to be a good idea and that it would be of benefit to them as students. The outcome of this on the long-term government aims for the EMA suggest that economic growth may be little affected, although social cohesion may be improved based on positive public perception of funding post-16 education (as suggested by the case study findings) equating with social justice.

The unfolding thesis of this research was established by an examination of the effectiveness of the EMA in achieving increased student participation, retention and achievement in further education theoretically and in South West College; and can be summarised as follows:

Government policy offers support of the widening participation agenda in further education as a means to improving the economy, but the structural theoretical basis of the EMA appears inappropriate for attaining increased levels of student participation and achievement and consequentially may have little impact on economic growth. The perceived benevolence of a discretionary financial incentive for further education students and the potential for improved student retention may, however, improve short-term social cohesion.

Limitations and Modifications

The student population identified in the aims of the research consisted of advanced level students on academic and vocational courses and therefore only represented the perceptions of two year students. On reflection, the exclusion of one year students from the case study may have had a limiting effect, in that one year students undertake lower level courses, enter further education for different reasons than two year students and, most importantly, are the group more likely to be tempted by employment (Davies, 2000). Had this student cohort been included in the case study, it may have altered the perceptions of the EMA identified and outcomes of the college data comparison for the EMA and non-EMA cohorts.

In relation to the perceptions sought to illuminate the aims of the research, it would have been appropriate to collect data from students who had left the course during the 1999 cohort. These data may have offered insight into the reasons for students leaving the college/course (poor retention) and expanded knowledge on the effectiveness of the EMA on student retention. Future research in this area may benefit from conducting in-depth biographical interviews with college leavers.

In hindsight it may have been more appropriate to focus only on student perceptions, rather than staff and student perceptions, because staff perceptions were based on speculation about the effect of the EMA on students instead of experience of the EMA. Further to this, the qualitative nature of the evaluation would have drawn greater illumination from data gathered by participant diaries or in-depth biographical interviews, rather than questionnaires. This was only realised after the semi-structured interviews were conducted and the data analysed. Themes emerged that would have benefited from a more detailed examination, which diaries or in-depth interviews would have allowed, but were not possible based on time and resource constraints (having already conducted the questionnaires). On reflection, any future research should address the issue of collecting data on student perceptions through a more in-depth strategy.

The case study is based on the experience of one college and therefore is not representative of a national picture. No generalisations can be formed from the case study data in relation

to the effectiveness of the EMA in increasing student participation, retention and achievement in other colleges. The effect of factors such as regional variations in the EMA models, variable cost of living, different costs and access to transport, different composition of the student body in terms of class etc., will all impact differently on the effectiveness of the EMA. Therefore, although the data examined for the case study illuminated the aims of the research, the conclusions that can be drawn from it are very limited. As Herbert and Callender (1997, p. 26-7) state:

It would be very misleading to assume that what pertains to one college applies to all colleges and to all students across the country as a whole.

However, the advantages of using this approach are that it could act as the basis for a larger study, offering ideas about areas to investigate further, or it could highlight a broad typicality to similar social areas.

Another issue that arises from the case study is that it is always difficult to isolate the impact of one variable, in this case financial support, from the wide range of contributory factors. It would have been more effective to analyse a large data set using multi level modelling in order to account more accurately for the impact of the EMA on student participation, retention and achievement. However, this type of quantitative analysis could not be conducted by the researcher within the constraints of the time and budget.

Representativeness within South West College was sought, in order to apply rigorous and systematic method to a qualitative evaluation, by using the whole advanced level population of the 1999 student cohort for both student questionnaires and through an attempt to use random sampling for the student and tutor interviews. Unfortunately the very low student response rate to the request for interview in the initial sample for student interviews necessitated the use of opportunity sampling to establish a sample. It could be claimed that not all EMA students in the 1999 cohort had an equal chance of being selected and therefore the data collected from the interviews do not form a representative sample of student perceptions on the EMA, however the case study presents a qualitative evaluation investigating a range of views to illuminate the aims of the research, rather than the representativeness of views.

Reliability and validity in qualitative research ultimately depend on demonstrating that the research methods used are fit for purpose. The questionnaires appeared reliable based on the use of a pilot questionnaire, which enabled the meaning of the questions to be unambiguous, and the high response rate for the final questionnaires resulting in a high degree of representativeness. The researcher is confident that should the questionnaire be re-issued to the same population, then very similar results would be found.

Consistent efforts were made to control for bias within the case study. By allowing themes to emerge from the student discussion group it was hoped that researcher bias could be avoided in the way in which questions were framed in the questionnaires. The use of theme generation in the analysis of the interview data was also applied in an attempt to reduce researcher bias. However, the presence of the research questions at the heart of this case study did have some influence on the questions asked, which introduced an unavoidable bias that the researcher was aware of and attempted to control through the application of principles associated with grounded theory in the research design.

An attempt was made in the interviews to ask the same questions in a similar way, framing the questions in as neutral a way as possible and ensuring that the 'prompts' for each question fell within the same parameters. However, on analysis of the data collected from the interviews it was evident that occasionally questions were asked in a way that inferred an answer. This may have jeopardised some of the validity associated with the responses, even though this type of questioning occurred approximately three times out of hundreds of questions, and would have been better not to have happened. The possibility for random and systematic error must also be considered, but was not evident in the analysis of data undertaken.

Validity may be supported by building rapport and trust with respondents during the interviews, allowing them to respond more openly and honestly to the interviewer. The research design may have limited the validity of student and tutor responses by restricting access to one interview with each respondent. By meeting the respondents

more than once a greater sense of trust and a better rapport may have been established, allowing for further revelations on the research area.

The rapport established with the students being interviewed was also limited by the nature of the sample selection. Opportunity sampling resulted in students being asked to be interviewed during their breaks and 'free' periods by a member of staff that they did not know, in a classroom, for a period of approximately twenty minutes. All of these factors made it difficult to strike up a rapport and may have affected validity. The tutors seemed reluctant to elaborate on many of the questions asked, resulting in less valid responses. It may have helped if tutors had been given time off teaching to take part in the interviews, rather than it taking place in their non-teaching time. On this basis they may have felt more generous in giving detailed, but time consuming, responses and thereby help the validity of the data.

The greatest limitation in this research is the lack of a sufficient number of data sets before and after the introduction of the EMA. On reflection it may have been possible to extend the number of data sets examined before the introduction of the EMA, but the number examined post-EMA was limited by the length of time that the researcher was able to commit to the case study. This said, it would have been more appropriate to examine more data sets to establish validity in the findings.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

This case study has gone some way in suggesting the effect of using an untested model for funding students from low-income households in further education (the EMA). While the case study does not indicate whether the EMA will be effective in achieving its aims nationally, it does attempt to codify the effect in South West College. Conclusions have been drawn with a view to testing them with a wider audience of policy makers, researchers and practitioners, as well as the mediators of policy, the LEAs.

Student attendance appeared to be an unintended consequence of the EMA policy. In South West College systems for monitoring attendance (in line with the 100% attendance criteria for payment) were made more rigorous with the effect of improving student attendance (demonstrated by registering attendance at lessons). However, although this outcome was

seen as positive by most students and staff, it was suggested that increased attendance of unmotivated EMA-recipients may possibly have a negative effect on the achievement of motivated students. This is a very important issue and deserves further research to discover the potential impact of disaffected pupils on student achievement. I would recommend that this be an area investigated in more detail.

The practical constraints of time and finance did limit the research by only allowing one college as the case study and by restricting the number of data sets within that case study. It is highly recommended that a representative sample of colleges with a larger number of pre- and post-EMA data sets in each college be examined for the effects of the EMA when the EMA is introduced nationally in 2004. This would present further illumination on the effect of the EMA on student participation, retention and achievement nationally.

Another issue that arises from the case study is that it is always difficult to isolate the impact of one variable, in this case financial support, from the wide range of contributory factors. It would have been more effective to analyse a large data set using multi level modelling in order to account more accurately for the impact of the EMA on student participation, retention and achievement. However, this type of quantitative analysis could not be conducted by the researcher within the constraints of the time, budget and data available, but is highly recommended as an area for further research.

Consistent efforts were made to control for bias within the case study. By allowing themes to emerge from the student discussion group it was hoped that researcher bias could be avoided in the way in which questions were framed in the questionnaires. The use of theme generation in the analysis of the interview data was also applied in an attempt to reduce researcher bias. Themes that emerged from the case study that would benefit from further research, but were outside of the aims of the research, were as follows:

EMA Application and Payment - a detailed examination of student application for the EMA could be undertaken, investigating the processes involved and the response of the LEA in issuing the allowance. In the case study students identified that they had applied for the EMA, but had not received it for up to four months. Issues that arose from this

theme in the case study were ones of fairness in the application process and problems with the application process. Both of these issues are important and warrant more detailed research because they may impact on early student retention i.e. students may drop out of college if they are in need of financial support and access to this is delayed.

EMA Process Injustices – a detailed exploration of students' perceived injustices of the EMA process, the actual EMA process and the effect both may have on student participation, retention and achievement. Several issues on this theme were raised in the case study, including:

- The day on which the payment was received - it was believed that a payment on Monday would be better than a payment on Friday, because students would be more likely to spend the money on necessary educational resources, rather than on socialising over the weekend.
- Missing a lecture because of illness – this could result in non-payment or delayed payment, discouraging students from attending for the rest of the week when better.
- Self-employment for parents - this resulted in a delay when completing financial details on the forms, generally because of tax returns, and then a delay in payment for the student.
- Disparity of payment - all students should receive an education maintenance allowance of some kind.
- Use of payment - it was argued that payment should be made to the college, who in turn would supply the student with resources to ensure that the money was being spent on education.

All of these issues raise questions about how the EMA has been operationalised and whether the process could be improved to raise students' perceptions. However, without further investigation into the processes involved with the EMA and students' attitudes towards it, nothing can be done to change it.

The EMA and Attendance – a detailed examination of the impact of the EMA on student attendance in further education could be carried out. The EMA necessitates 100% attendance (including authorised absences) in order for full payment to occur. South West College implemented a more rigorous attendance system to accommodate this

criterion, but staff and students still claimed that some EMA students were falsifying attendance to claim the EMA. Therefore the issue to arise from this theme is whether the EMA improves attendance or whether it only appears to improve attendance because of false authorised absence claims, which makes this an important area of further research.

Year 11 EMA Information – a detailed investigation into how students are told about the EMA, what information they are given, by whom and at what time in the school year could be conducted. Issues on this theme emerged in the case study in relation to the EMA and student participation in further education. Findings indicated that students in Year 11 lacked information about the EMA, which may have had serious consequences for its impact on increased student participation. The need to ensure that clear and detailed information is given in Year 11 on the EMA is evident and necessitates further investigation into this area.

This research was conducted to investigate the effect of the EMA on participation, retention and achievement for young people from low-income families on full-time advanced level further education courses in South West College; and to examine the relevant literature in order to identify the extent to which a financial incentive could improve post-16 participation, retention and achievement. The findings of the research answered the questions posed at the outset by stating what any EMA was, why it was developed, clarifying its aims and suggesting how effective it would be in meeting those aims, but offer a pessimistic forecast on the success of the EMA in meeting the government's short-term and long-term aims. The positive regard for funding and education warns that these findings may be met with scepticism, as all original and challenging works generally are.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STUDENT INVITATION TO DISCUSSION GROUP

HEADED PAPER

January 2000

Dear Student

You have been invited to take part in a student discussion group about the new Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Your views and opinions about the EMA are important and could be used to help inform both college and national policy for the EMA. Take this opportunity to be heard and make a difference.

The discussion group will take place at 1.00 p.m. in Room *** on the 14th January. Please return the slip below (hand it in at main reception) within one week to confirm attendance.

Thank You

Tanya Hope
Lecturer in Sociology & Education

Name:

Tutor Group:

Contact telephone no.:

- I will be attending the discussion group about the EMA
- I will not be attending the discussion group about the EMA

Q8: Did the possibility of receiving the EMA influence your decision to stay on in post-16 education?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q9: What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving EMA? *Tick all applicable*

- No difficulties
- Getting payment after starting College
- Delayed payments each week
- Incorrect level of payment
- Other.....(specify)

Q10: Is the EMA a realistic level of funding, i.e. does it provide enough financial support to fund your studies: e.g. books, paper etc.

- Yes
- No How much money would you suggest a student should receive per week?
Justify your answer.

Amount per week.....

Reason.....

Q11: Has the EMA had a direct effect on your attendance at College?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q12: Has the EMA had a direct effect on your staying on a course at the College?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q13: Are you willing to be interviewed about your thoughts on the EMA? (Have your opinions heard and perhaps affect future policy!) The interviews will take place each term and last half an hour (refreshments will be provided).

Yes Name _____ Tutor Group _____

Contact Telephone Number _____

No

Tanya Hope
Lecturer in Education & Sociology
***** College

Q8: Did the possibility of receiving the EMA influence your decision to stay on in post-16 education?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q9: What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving EMA? Tick all applicable

- No difficulties
- Getting payment after starting College
- Delayed payments each week
- Incorrect level of payment
- Other.....(specify)

Q10: Is the EMA a realistic level of funding, i.e. does it provide enough financial support to fund your studies: e.g. books, paper etc.

- Yes
- No How much money would you suggest a student should receive per week?
Justify your answer.

Amount per week.....

Reason.....

Q11: Has the EMA had a direct affect on your attendance at College?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q12: Has the EMA had a direct affect on your staying on a course at the College?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q13: Are you willing to be interviewed about your thoughts on the EMA? (Have your opinions heard and perhaps affect future policy!) The interviews will take place each term and last half an hour (refreshments will be provided).

Yes Name _____ Tutor Group _____

Contact Telephone Number _____

No

Tanya Hope
Lecturer in Education & Sociology
***** College

Q7: Have you received any payment through the EMA yet?

Yes 1.00

No 2.00

Q8: Did the possibility of receiving the EMA influence your decision to stay on in post-16 education?

Yes 1.00

No 2.00

Not sure 3.00

Q9: What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving EMA? Tick all applicable

No difficulties 1.00

Getting payment after starting College 2.00

Delayed payments each week 3.00

Incorrect level of payment 4.00

Other.....code after.....(specify)

Q10: Is the EMA a realistic level of funding, ie does it provide enough financial support to fund your studies: eg books, paper etc.

Yes 1.00

No How much money would you suggest a student should receive per week?

Justify your answer. 2.00

Amount per week.....put on word.....

Reason.....put on word.....

Q11: Has the EMA had a direct affect on your attendance at College?

Yes 1.00

No 2.00

Not sure 3.00

Q12: Has the EMA had a direct affect on your staying on a course at the College?

Yes 1.00

No 2.00

Not sure 3.00

Q13: Are you willing to be interviewed about your thoughts on the EMA? (Have your opinions heard and perhaps affect future policy!) The interviews will take place each term and last half an hour (refreshments will be provided).

Yes Name _____ Tutor Group _____

Contact Telephone Number _____

No

Tanya Hope
Lecturer in Education & Sociology
***** College

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO TUTORS

HEADED PAPER

1 February 2000

Dear Tutor

EMA Research – Year 1 Students only

I am currently conducting some research into the EMA and its impact on ***** College. It is important that I achieve a high response rate with the attached questionnaires in order to establish reliable data. I would therefore appreciate it if you would encourage your students to take the questionnaire seriously, return the completed questionnaire to reception (before 11 February 2000) in the envelope provided and to participate in the interviews.

Please distribute the questionnaire to all your YEAR ONE tutees only. If at all possible, ask them to complete the questionnaire in the tutor session for immediate return to reception.

I would also be very interested in any issues **you**, as a tutor, would like to raise or observations you would like to make in relation to the EMA. If you would like to make any comments in the box below and/or take part in an interview, please return this sheet to my pigeonhole (TH) by 11 February 2000.

Thank you for your help.

Tanya Hope
Lecturer in Education and Sociology

I would like to be interviewed about the EMA

Tutor Name:

Contact Telephone No.:

I would like to make the following comments about the EMA

Comments

APPENDIX E

EMA STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

JUNE 2000

Statement: Interview with student number on June 2000.

The identity of the student is strictly confidential.

Information collected from this interview will form part of a research paper for national distribution.

1. Tell me as much as you can about the Educational Maintenance Allowance.

(PROMPTS: What is the EMA? What are you entitled to receive from the EMA? Who gets the EMA? How is the EMA paid?)

2. In what ways did the EMA affect your decision to go on to a full-time course in further education?

(PROMPTS: Did the knowledge of receiving a cash payment make it easier for you to attend college? Was the possibility of cash and college better than employment?)

3. In what ways has receiving the EMA affected you as a student?

(PROMPTS: Has the EMA made your attendance better? **Would you have left college if it wasn't for the EMA?** Has the EMA made it easier to participate in college trips and activities?)

4. Can you think of any ways in which the EMA may affect your success on the course?

(PROMPTS: Do you think the EMA affects achievement? Has it made you more determined to succeed on the course? How could the EMA affect your performance in the exam or during coursework?)

5. Would you like to make any final comments about the EMA?

STATEMENT: Thank you for your time. I may be in touch next year for a follow up interview.

APPENDIX F

EMA INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

DIRECTOR OF STUDIES – ***** COLLEGE

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview, the results of which will help to inform a study on the Educational Maintenance Allowance in ***** College.

Question 1: Please introduce yourself, providing details of your role in the College and your involvement with the EMA.

Question 2: Please explain your understanding of the EMA.

Question 3: What do you think were the government's main aims in introducing the EMA to FE?

Question 4: Do you believe that the EMA has had any direct effect on the following in the College? :

- **Student participation**
- **Student retention**
- **Student achievement**

Question 5: On what evidence do you base your perceptions of the effect of the EMA on student participation, retention and achievement?

Question 6: What do you believe could be the best possible outcome of providing a financial incentive to students in post-16 education at Truro College?

Question 7: Thank you for your time, any further comments you would like to make on the EMA?

APPENDIX Fi

23 November 2000

Interview with *****, Director of Studies, **** College

Tanya Hope: **** can you introduce yourself, give me details of your role and your involvement with EMA?

Director of Studies: Okay, ****, Director of Studies at **** College, my role is responsibility for curriculum innovations and student services and therefore in relation to the EMA I have been involved right from the start, from the initial discussions about the development and the initial introduction in the College.

TH: And were you involved in any consortium efforts to introduce EMA within *****?

DS: Yes, the Colleges and the County met together initially right from the outset and we also met really back in the early days representatives from the DFEE who came initially to explain the outline of the overall programme and then they also explained the pilot and the way in which that would differ in each area before they talked about the model for *****.

TH: So could you explain to me exactly what you understand by the Educational Maintenance Allowance, you've mentioned a pilot, how could you extend on that?

DS: Right I think first of all to focus on the pilot we were one of the first authorities to be involved in the pilot but there has been subsequent development in that and within the pilot there was a model introduced for each authority which did differ slightly, for example in some areas payment was made direct to parents, in ***** it was made direct to the students. What was the first part of your question?

TH: What you really understand by the EMA, what does it involve?

DS: Right, essentially it's a payment to a cohort of students, students who were in last year's year eleven and the previous cohort. It was introduced as an incentive to encourage students to stay on but also to provide support for students who stayed on in full time educational training.

TH: So what would you actually say, in your opinion that the aims of the government were in introducing an incentive that was financial for further education students?

DS: Well I think you encourage the greater achievement of the national education and training targets which is dependent on more young people getting involved in full time education and training. It's also at a time where the economy is thriving and compared with the recent past and at times such as this there is a danger that more young people will be going straight into work without the foundation of educational training.

TH: Do you think that's had an influence on them introducing more pilots in local educational authorities since 2000, September 2000?

DS: Yes, I'm not quite clear whether the phased introduction was there in the strategy from the outset that certainly wasn't discussed we only discussed the initial pilot but that may well be the case. Also one thing we did have to remind ourselves right at the very beginning is that it was a pilot and therefore our role was to support the development but at the same time try different models and feedback on different models, that we weren't necessarily expected to get it right at the outset and therefore from the governments point of view I could see the sense of having a formative evaluation of the first pilot and then possibly looking at a second phase and possibly amending the pilot slightly.

TH: Are you aware then of any formative evaluation that went on?

DS: Yes, we certainly had to feedback to the DFEE on the initial development phases of the pilot.

TH: And who did that within ***** College?

DS: Well within ***** College we didn't feedback direct because it's the County which is the stronghold for the ***** pilot and so the County liased with the colleges, both in relation to the collection of the statistical information but also we had quite regular meetings initially where we just tried to iron out the teething problems.

TH: Thank you, so bringing it closer to home then would you say that the EMA has had any direct effect on either student participation, student retention or student achievement?

DS: Yes I think quite definitely, if you look at our statistics within the College you will see that there has been an improvement in student retention during the last year. It's always difficult to identify the variable factors and then really identify what is specifically responsible but it does coincide with the introduction of the EMA and therefore we have to consider that as one of the important factors that could have influenced retention. I think that the other outcome in the College has been that the very introduction of the EMA itself has had you know something of a hawthorn effect that because we're looking at experience of the introduction of this funding then we are focusing far more on student attendance, we have a much more systematic record for recording that, there is far more debate within curriculum teams across the college, within management groups. We are looking more closely at our systems within the college but also it's for other colleges together to focus on, common experiences of and improving retention and therefore I think we've actually established an informal benchmarking group and that's quite interesting because within the context of ***** colleges have been much more co-operative more recently, I think this is just one example of how that's happened.

TH: Which is no bad thing is it?

DS: No it's a really good thing.

TH: So retention has definitely been affected. Participation, are there any indicators that students are participating at a higher level as a consequence of EMA or is that too difficult?

DS: Well I suppose we could make a fair assumption if students are here they are more likely to participate, yes. Cause there not likely to be here and not participate because the other factor within EMA is not only you know bodies within the room but it's the extent to which students are honouring their contract of the learning agreement and therefore they've got to be undertaking work that is set and having assignments in on time, I mean the bonus is linked to that.

TH: But for 16 year olds entering the College for September 2000 were there any increased numbers? Could we take that as a sign of increased participation?

DS Oh gosh I'd have to go back and look specifically at the figures. But again there are so many other factors that one needs to take into account, for example the cohort within *****, how that is spread within the local schools compared with the distance schools, I mean other factors quite honestly like transport arrangements are such an important feature within *****, that in itself is an interesting consideration because the EMA does provide additional help with transport but nevertheless it's still dependent on appropriate transport being in place for access to the college.

TH: And achievement, I think perhaps it's a little early to tell isn't it because...

DS: Yes it certainly is, the only benchmark I think you could look at would be the possible achievement of AS' and possibly one year intermediate courses and look at last years completion compared with the previous year's but again a word of caution it does vary so much year on year it's not a good firm indicator.

TH: Which is why, perhaps, we've been looking at a two year cohort taking into account that effect.

DS: That's right yeah.

TH: Excellent. Do you believe that there could be any possible outcome, let me rephrase that, what do you think could be the best possible outcome of providing financial incentive to post 16 students in ***** College on a very local scale, giving them thirty pounds per week, what could be the best outcome of that, the best possible?

DS: I think probably the best outcome is a recognition of the fact that we all value education and training for young people and that we value it so much that we're willing to reward it and also that we recognise that some young people have an incredible difficulty in sustaining that commitment if they come from a situation of hardship where often the pressure is on them to earn money and sometimes quite honestly they can't afford the day to day cost of courses and therefore by giving them funding in a way which seems to be equitable i.e. it is means tested and more goes to the students who are in a greater situation of hardship then I think that's got to be right.

TH: So would I be correct in summing that up as it provides access for students to an education which may not be accessible without that money?

DS: Yes I think probably it's more than that cause in my experience I think the access probably perceived to be there and certainly within ***** had a relatively good track record of getting students in, what EMA does is enable them to stay once they are here. I think it does however affect attitudes to the opportunities of education and training. The reason I'm hesitating about this is that we only have evidence of access if the student numbers had increased last year for the reasons I mentioned earlier it is difficult to say that exactly but I do know that certainly when EMA was announced that there were many parents who came in on our open evening and really wanted to know more and indicated that it would make a difference and also

the other factor is that in the past we have had students starting courses but because they have been in a situation of hardship they've had to take on part time employment which throughout the year has increased and it is increased to the extent that it does begin to interfere with study and I think there is a direct correlation between the number of hours that students work and the ability they have to undertake their independent study and assignment work related to the course.

TH: So perhaps a better way to look at it is social inclusion, it allows them to be included within all the processes within the college so it may not allow them access within the first instance because they would have come anyway but when they are here they can participate in courses fully.

DS: I think that's right, social inclusion is probably the best way of describing it overall, ensuring that they do continue to be included.

TH: Excellent. Any final comments you would like to make on the EMA?

DS: In relation to the EMA, well I just think it's a really good thing, you know it provides incentive to young people, it rewards their attendance, it rewards their achievement, at the same time I would fully support the model in ***** where the EMA is paid directly to the students concerned because the other factor is that they have to have a bank account and they've got to manage their money as well they've also got to take responsibility for accounting when their absent, I think that does set a really good foundation for their future education if their going on to university if they get into the practice of having to say if their going to be absent, having to justify that, but also having to manage their finances at an early stage. I mean that's got to be good for the future.

TH: Excellent, thank you *****.

DS: Pleasure.

APPENDIX G

EMA INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

TUTORS ***** COLLEGE

Thank you for taking part in this interview. You have been selected as part of a random stratified sample of Tutors in ***** College to take part in this survey.

The data collected will help to inform a study on the Educational Maintenance Allowance in ***** College and support a thesis that may influence national policy.

Question 1: Please introduce yourself, providing details of your role in the College and your involvement with the EMA.

Question 2: Please explain what you think is the aim of the EMA.

Question 3: Do you believe that the EMA has had any direct effect on the following in the College? :

- Student participation
- Student retention
- Student achievement

Question 4: On what evidence do you base your perceptions of the effect of the EMA on student participation, retention and achievement?

Question 5: What do you believe could be the best possible outcome of providing a financial incentive to students in post-16 education at Truro College?

Question 6: Thank you for your time, any further comments you would like to make on the EMA?

Thank you.

APPENDIX H

Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Student Questionnaire Year 2

ONLY TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENTS ON THE 2ND YEAR OF AN
ADVANCED COURSE

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, your answers will contribute towards an evaluation of the success of the EMA in ***** College. Please return the completed questionnaire to reception, in the envelope provided, before 21 May 2001.

Q1: Are you a student on the second year of an Advanced Level course?

- Yes
 No*

*Please do not complete the questionnaire.

Q2: Have you applied for an EMA?

- Yes
 No*

*Complete Question 3 and 4 only.

Q3: Do you understand what the EMA entitles you to?

- Yes
 No

Q4: Do you think that the EMA is a good idea in further education?

- Yes(specify)
 No(specify)
 Not sure(specify)

Non EMA students finish questionnaire here.

Q5: Have you received any payment of the EMA for this academic year?

- Yes
 No

Q6: What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with receiving EMA? Tick all applicable

- No difficulties
 Getting payment after starting College
 Delayed payments each week
 Incorrect level of payment

Other.....(specify)

Q7: Is the EMA a realistic level of funding, i.e. has it provided enough financial support to fund your studies: e.g. books, paper etc.

Yes

No How much money would you suggest a student should receive per week?
Justify your answer.

Amount per week.....

Reason.....

Q8: Has the EMA had a direct affect on your attendance at College?

Yes

No

Not sure

Q9: Has the EMA had a direct affect on your staying on your course at the College?

Yes

No

Not sure

Q10: Has the EMA had a direct affect on your achievement levels at the College?

Yes

No

Not sure

Thank you

Tanya Hope

Deputy Team Leader (Humanities), Lecturer in Education.

***** College

APPENDIX I

The six models of EMA funding

(LEAs marked with a * offer extensions designed to help vulnerable young people²²):

Model 1: (£30/wk + £50/£50 bonus) was piloted in Cornwall*, Knowsley, Leeds, Liverpool, Luton, Manchester, Middlesborough, Northumberland, Southampton, Sheffield, Walsall and Wolverhampton. A maximum of £30 per week was paid direct to the student. Young people were eligible to receive an EMA if their parents' annual taxable income was below £30,000. The full weekly amount was received where the income was less than £13,000. A tapered amount down to a minimum of £5 per week was received where the income is between £13,000 and £30,000. A £50 retention and £50 achievement bonus was paid to students. The attendance requirement for this model was that 100% of EMA entitlement was lost as a result of not meeting the learning agreement that week (e.g. any absence or failure to hand in homework)

Model 2: (£40/wk + £50/£50 bonus) was piloted in Nottingham* and Oldham. A maximum of £40 per week was paid direct to the student based on the same parental income as for model 1. The same bonus for retention and achievement was paid direct to the student as in model 1. The attendance requirement was the same as model 1.

Model 3: (£30/wk to the parent + £50/50 bonus) was piloted in Bolton, Coventry, (Staged Penalty), Doncaster, Tameside, North Tyneside and Wakefield. A maximum of £30 per week was paid to the parent based on the same parental income as for model 1. The same

²² As part of the continued development of the existing EMA pilots and in response to a consultation paper on 'bridging the gap' between education and employment (Foresight, 2000), an additional set of small-scale pilots were set up from September 2000. These are testing out ways to provide additional support needed by young people from more disadvantaged or vulnerable groups, who have more serious personal problems to overcome or who might not be able to be in learning full time. These pilots were set up in four existing EMA areas, looking at the specific needs of young people who are homeless, have disabilities or are teenage parents. The aim of these pilots is to identify and explore ways in which the EMA might be adjusted to encourage more of these young people to participate in further education.

bonus for retention and achievement was paid direct to the student as in model 1. The attendance requirement was the same as model 1, except for staged penalties where a weekly loss of 50% of EMA entitlement was given for the first absence or failure to hand in homework and 100% loss for any further offence in any week in that term was put into place.

Model 4: (£30/wk + £80/£140 bonus) was piloted in Birmingham, Gateshead, Leicester, City South, Tyneside, Stoke on Trent* and Wigan. A maximum of £30 per week was paid direct to the student based on the same parental income as for model 1. A bonus of £80 for retention and £140 for achievement was paid to students. The attendance requirement was the same as model 1.

Model 5: (£20,000 cut-off) was piloted in Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Camden, Ealing, Fulham, Greenwich, Hackney, Halton, Hammersmith & Waltham, Forest, Hartlepool, Haringey, Islington, Kingston upon Hull (Staged Penalty), Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Salford, Sandwell, Southwark, Wandsworth and Tower Hamlets. A maximum of £30 per week was paid direct to the student. Young people were eligible to receive an EMA if their parents' annual taxable income is below £20,000. The full weekly amount will be received where the income is less than £13,000. A tapered amount down to a minimum of £5 per week will be received where the income is between £13,000 and £20,000. The same bonus for retention and achievement was paid direct to the student as in model 1. The attendance requirement was the same as model 1, except for in staged penalty areas where a weekly loss of 50% of EMA entitlement for the first absence or failure to hand in homework and 100% loss for any further offence in any week in that term was put into place.

Model 6: (£25,000 cut off) was piloted in Bradford, Barnsley, St Helens and Wirral. A maximum of £30 per week was paid direct to the student. Young people were eligible to receive an EMA if their parents' annual taxable income is below £25,000. The full weekly amount will be received where the income is less than £13,000. A tapered amount down to a minimum of £5 per week will be received where the income is between £13,000 and £20,000. The same bonus for retention and achievement was paid direct to the student as in model 1. The attendance requirement was the same as model 1

There were also two transport models piloted:

Transport Model: (Costs and Bonus) was piloted in East Lancashire, Sunderland and Suffolk. A top-up discount over and above LEA subsidy to ensure free home-to-school transport regardless of distance from school/college was provided. Young people were eligible for free home-to-place of study transport if their parent's annual taxable income is below £30,000. Half the retention bonus rewarded 90% attendance, and the full retention bonus rewarded 100% attendance.

Transport Model: (Hybrid) was piloted in North East Lancashire and Worcestershire. A maximum of £20 was payable direct to the student. Young people were eligible to receive a 50% discount on their remaining home-to-place of study transport costs, after any LEA subsidy, regardless of distance from school/college. There was no bonus. 100% of EMA entitlement was lost as a result of not meeting the learning agreement that week (e.g. any absence or failure to hand in homework).