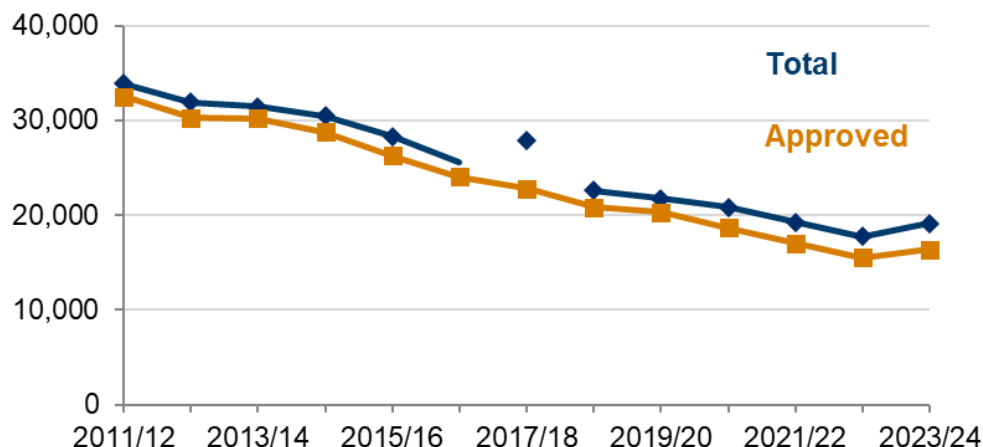




Education Maintenance Allowances awarded in Wales, 2023/24

30 January 2025
SB 4/2025

Figure 1: Trends in applications and approvals by academic year



Note: In 2017/18, a number of students were incorrectly included in the total applications figure. This figure should not be compared with any other years

Source: Student loans Company

Main points

Education Maintenance Allowances Awarded in Wales, 2023/24

In 2023/24:

16,355 approved applications.
Up 5% from last year.

19,125 total applications.
Increased this year.

Of the approved applications:

(16) (17) (18+)

7,490 (46%) were aged 16
6,315 (39%) were aged 17
2,555 (16%) were aged 18 and over.

Main points:



The number of both applications and approvals has **increased this year** having previously shown a downward trend since 2010/11.



In 2023/24, **16,355 (86%)** of applications were approved, **1,850 (10%)** were rejected and **910 (5%)** were incomplete.



Of the approved applications, **8,620 (53%)** were from first year claimants.

About this bulletin

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is a scheme providing young people who wish to continue in education after school leaving age with an incentive to earn awards through good attendance and achieving agreed objectives.

The data included here are obtained from Student Loans Company (SLC). Unless otherwise stated, figures are for the 2023/24 academic year, at the end of August 2024.

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Policy and operational context

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is a scheme providing young people from certain households who wish to continue in education after school leaving age with an incentive to earn awards through good attendance and achieving agreed objectives. EMA increased from £30 to £40 per week in April 2023.

During the academic year 2023/24, Welsh Government commissioned an [independent review of the EMA Scheme in Wales](#). The review was published in July 2024 and made 10 recommendations. A response to this report will be published in due course.

The review concluded that EMA should continue to target those from low-income households. It also highlighted that for many students, EMA provides an opportunity for them to work less, focussing on their attendance and studies, enabling them to participate in extra-curricular activities, and reducing the stress and worry about the financial burden their post-16 study had on their family.

The scheme is available to 16 to 18 year olds but entitlement may be extended beyond this if they have not already received 3 years of EMA. For more information on eligibility, see the [Notes](#) section.

Trends in applications and approvals for EMA provided in this release should be considered against the context of trends in the eligible cohort (of mainly 16 to 18 year olds), their participation in education and training, and their household income levels (since EMA is means-tested). The household income thresholds for eligibility have remained the same since 2011/12. Student numbers for 16 to 18 year olds were declining from 2016/17 but saw an increase in 2019/20. The numbers appear to be increasing in 2023/24 and 2024/25 but these are based on projected figures so should be treated with caution. Student numbers for 2015/16 to 2020/21 are taken from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR). From 2023/24 onwards, the figures are estimates based on pupil numbers in maintained schools or further education.

16-18 year old learner population

2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24(e)	2024/25(e)
64,190	60,845	59,715	57,130	58,960	60,615	59,845	61,545	62,460	63,345

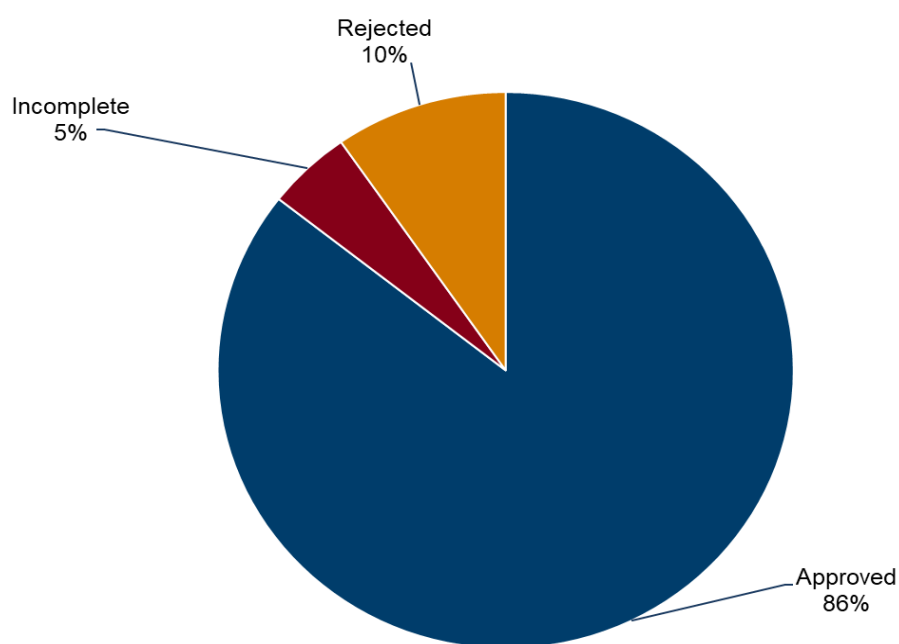
(e) Estimate

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)

Note that these projections are for further education institutions and maintained secondary and special schools, counting full time students with at least a 10 week expected duration. Independent schools are excluded.

Applications received by current work stage

Figure 2: Applications received by current work stage, as at 31 August 2024



Source: Student Loans Company

As at 31st August 2024, 86% of applications received had been approved and 10% had been rejected. 5% were incomplete (either 'missing information' such as no date of birth included or 'missing evidence' such as no birth certificate attached). There were very few in the 'Other' category this year.

Table 1: Applications by current work stage (a)

Work stage	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Approved	20,280	18,690	17,035	15,545	16,355
<i>of which received payment</i>	20,085	18,480	16,870	15,395	16,310
Rejected	775	1,500	1,585	1,470	1,850
Incomplete (b)	635	615	645	720	910
Other (c)	40	10	5	5	5
Total	21,730	20,815	19,265	17,740	19,125
<i>of which are renewals (d)</i>	11,025	10,850	17,190	8,640	8,995

Source: Student Loans Company

(a) As at 31st August

(b) These include applications that have "missing information" (e.g. no date of birth included) or "missing evidence" (e.g. no birth certificate attached)

(c) awaiting rejection; data capture incomplete; failed assessment; validated; verified (as defined by SLC).

(d) Applicants who also applied for an allowance in previous academic year

Approved applications for 2023/24 made up 86% (16,355) of the total 19,125 applications.

Approved applications by household income threshold

Table 2: Approved applications by household income and number of dependents (a)

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
One dependent (b)	15,230	13,940	12,775	11,605	12,095
More than one dependent (c)	5,050	4,710	4,260	3,750	4,255
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0
Total	20,280	18,650	17,035	15,355	16,355

(a) As at 31st August 2024

Source: Student Loans Company

(b) Household income up to £20,817

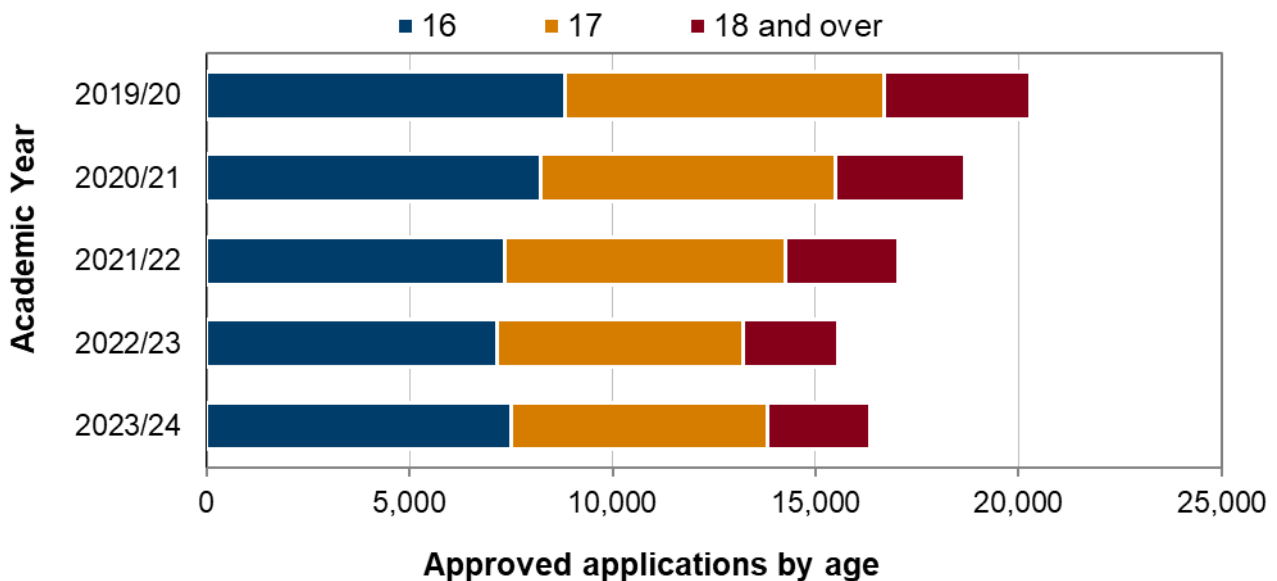
(c) Household income up to £23,077

There are two different household income thresholds, which are based on the student's family circumstances. See [Notes](#) page for more information about household income criteria.

In 2023/24, the numbers approved using the lower household income threshold increased by 505 (13%). The number approved from the higher threshold increased by 495 (4%).

Approved applications by age

Figure 3: Approved applications by age (a)



(a) As at 31st August

Source: Student Loans Company

In 2023/24, 7,490 (46%) of approved applications were from 16 year olds, 6,315 (39%) of approved applications were from 17 year olds and the remaining 2,555 (16%) of approved applications were from applicants aged 18 and over.

Relating this data to the LLWR population estimate data referred to in 'Policy and operational context', 32% of 18 year old learners received EMA whilst 25% of 16 to 17 year olds received EMA.

Approved applications by learning centre type

Table 3: Approved applications by age, learning centre type, gender and year (a)

	2022/23				2023/24			
	16	17	18+	Total	16	17	18+	Total
Further education college:	5,190	4,375	2,120	11,680	5,535	4,645	2,350	12,530
Males	2,575	2,170	1,010	5,755	2,705	2,350	1,215	6,270
Females	2,615	2,205	1,105	5,925	2,830	2,295	1,135	6,260
Secondary school:	1,815	1,550	70	3,435	1,800	1,535	90	3,425
Males	975	900	35	1,910	790	665	40	1,500
Females	840	650	40	1,525	1,005	865	50	1,925
Other learning centre:	145	150	130	425	160	135	110	400
Males	45	55	40	140	110	90	65	265
Females	100	95	90	285	45	45	40	135
All learning centres:	7,145	6,075	2,320	15,545	7,490	6,315	2,555	16,355
Males	3,595	3,125	1,085	7,805	3,610	3,105	1,325	8,035
Females	3,555	2,950	1,235	7,735	3,885	3,205	1,230	8,320

(a) As at 31st August

Source: Student Loans Company

- 12,530 students attending further education colleges had their applications approved, accounting for 77% of all approved applications.
- 3,425 students attending secondary schools had their applications approved, accounting for 21% of all approved applications.
- The remaining 400 (2%) approved applications were for students attending other learning centres (special schools, independent schools and grammar schools).

Approved applications by gender

Table 4: Approved applications by gender and year (a)

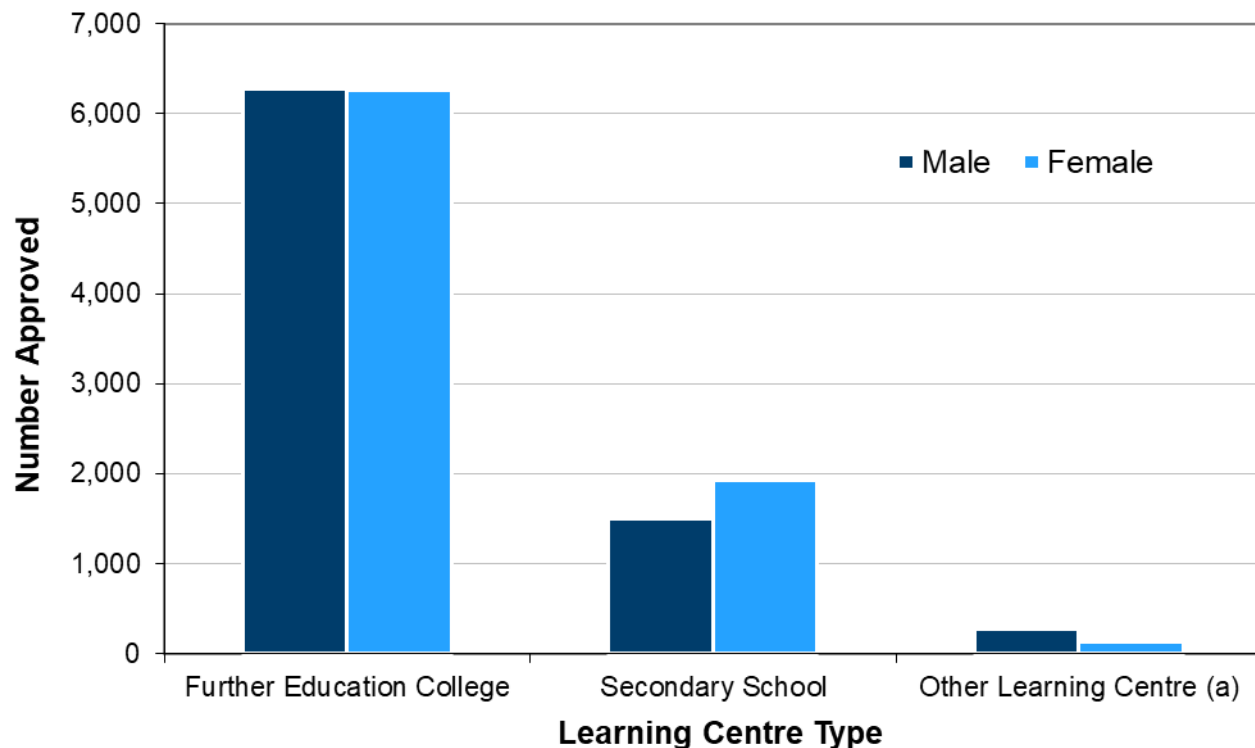
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
All students	20,280	18,690	17,035	15,545	16,355
Male	10,110	9,085	8,305	7,805	8,035
Female	10,165	9,605	8,730	7,735	8,320

(a) As at 31st August

Source: Student Loans Company

8,320 (51%) of approved applications came from female students; this percentage has stayed approximately the same since 2019/20.

Figure 4: Approved applications by learning centre type and gender, 2023/24 (a)



Source: Student Loans Company

(a) Other Learning Centre comprises Special schools, Independent schools and Grammar schools.

In further education colleges approved applications were split evenly between male and female students. In secondary schools more of the approved applications were from female students (56%) with male students making up the other 44%. Unlike secondary schools, the majority of approved applications in other learning centres were from male students (66%).

Approved applications by year claiming EMA

Table 5: Approved applications by year claiming EMA (a)

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total	20,280	18,690	17,035	15,545	16,355
Year claiming EMA:					
First	10,050	9,185	8,300	8,155	8,620
Second	7,540	7,060	6,535	5,720	5,915
Third	2,685	2,445	2,200	1,670	1,820
Fourth	0	0	*	0	0

Source: Students Loan Company

(a) As at 31st August

* The data item is disclosive or not sufficiently robust for publication (more than 0, less than 5)

In 2023/24, 8,620 (53%) of approved applications were from first year claimants.

Notes

1. EMA eligibility criteria

[Full criteria can be found on the Student Finance Wales website.](#)

Student criteria

- Aged 16, 17 or 18 years old¹ on 31st August at the start of the academic year
- Has a bank or building society current account
- Meets the nationality/residency criteria.

Course criteria

- Studying full-time at a school; or studying at least 12 guided hours a week at a recognised further education institution
- Studying an academic or vocational course up to and including level 3 (eligible academic or vocational course include GCSEs, A-Levels, BTECs, NVQs, GNVQs and Basic Skills courses)
- Studying an eligible course that lasts at least 10 weeks.

Household income criteria

- Evidence of household income in the prior tax year determines whether a student will be eligible for an EMA.
- There are two different household income thresholds, which are based on the student's family circumstances. Students will not be able to receive EMA if their household income is above the threshold levels.

Household income thresholds for EMA eligibility

Family circumstances	Household income threshold
There is one dependent child in the household	£0 - £20,817
There are one or more dependants aged 16 or under in the household	£0 - £23,077
There are one or more dependants aged 20 or under in full-time education or training and eligible for child benefit in the household	£0 - £23,077

2. Data source

[EMA applications and payments are administered by the Student Loans Company](#) (SLC). Data held on EMA students is entered by SLC staff onto an administrative database for the purpose of assessing and paying EMA to students. This data is also stored in a management information data warehouse for the purpose of management reporting, operational performance reporting, audit of processes, statistics, future policy planning and forecasting.

Data collection

The data in this release were collected via the SLC management information system and were extracted on 10 September 2024. All information is based on applications received by 31st August of each academic year (31 August 2024 for 2023/24).

¹ Entitlement may be extended beyond this if they have not already received 3 years of EMA.

Validation and verification

Processes and systems which enable customer and application assessment data to be held electronically are subject to periodic audit and integrity checks. SLC Internal Audit ensures that the processes governing data entry and application assessment are adhered to. Data integrity validation rules are used to identify and correct errors in data. Management Information extracted from SLC systems are subject to quality assurances prior to distribution: statisticians within the Welsh Government review the data and query any anomalies with the SLC before tables are published.

Publication

Once the data has been finalised, the release is compiled and the main points and commentary are drafted. The release is independently checked and a final sense check is carried out by the relevant statistician prior to publication on the website.

Disclosure control and confidentiality

All the figures are rounded to the nearest 5 for confidentiality. Where figures have been rounded there may be an apparent discrepancy between the sum of the constituent items and the total.

The following symbols are used in the tables:

- the data item is not exactly zero but is less than half the final digit shown.
- . the data item is not applicable.
- .. the data item is not available.
- * the data item is disclosive or not sufficiently robust for publication.

3. Definitions

3.1 Change in applicant circumstances

The data represented in this release refer to applicants' most recent learning agreement.

Therefore, if an applicant has attended more than one type of learning centre, to avoid double-counting they are only included under their most recent status.

4. Equal opportunities

7,685 equal opportunities monitoring forms were received in 2023/24 which equates to 44% of all applications received. It is not known whether these applications have been approved, rejected or are currently being processed since the data are disassociated from the application process, and not all forms are fully completed.

The data of applications for which an equal opportunities form was completed as of 3 September 2024 show that:

- 13% classed themselves as disabled.
- 2% said they were Black or British Black.
- 10% made up the groups who were of Mixed race, Asian or British Asian and 'Chinese or other ethnic origin group.
- 88% classed their ethnicity as White.
- 0.1% described themselves with multiple ethnicities.

Quality information

This section provides a summary of information on this output against five dimensions of quality: Relevance, Accuracy, Timeliness and Punctuality, Accessibility and Clarity, Comparability and Coherence.

Relevance

The statistics are used both within and outside the Welsh Government to monitor educational trends and as a baseline for further analysis of the underlying data. Some of the main users are:

- ministers and the Members Research Service in the National Assembly for Wales;
- officials in the Welsh Government;
- Other government departments;
- Further Education Institutions, Work-Based Learning providers, schools and local authorities;
- Wales Audit Office;
- students, researchers, academics and universities;
- individual citizens, private companies, and the media.

These statistics are used in a variety of ways. Some examples of these are:

- advice to Ministers;
- to inform and evaluate the education policy-making process in Wales;
- to forecast future expenditure of student support schemes in Wales.

Accuracy

Statisticians within the Welsh Government review the data and query any anomalies with the Student Loans Company before tables are published. The figures in this release reflect the final position as at the end of the 2023/24 academic year (31st August 2024), and are correct as at 10 September 2024.

Looking at previous years' data, it is possible to estimate how close provisional data are to final data. Below is a table showing the percentage increase/decrease seen between each month's update of approved applications, compared with final (end of August) figures, published in September:

Percentage change between provisional monthly and final data (as at 31 August)

Academic year	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
2016/17	8.4%	3.6%	1.4%	0.6%	0.1%	-0.2%	-0.4%	-0.5%	0.1%	0.0%
2017/18	3.9%	1.8%	0.5%	0.4%	-0.1%	-0.3%	-0.6%	-0.5%	0.1%	0.0%
2018/19	5.5%	3.1%	1.4%	0.9%	0.1%	-0.2%	-0.5%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
2019/20	3.4%	1.1%	0.3%	0.4%	0.1%	-0.1%	-0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
2020/21	-0.4%	2.8%	1.1%	0.4%	-0.2%	-0.6%	-1.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
2021/22	4.4%	1.8%	0.1%	-0.4%	-0.7%	-0.9%	-1.0%	-0.5%	0.1%	0.0%
2022/23	9.7%	4.9%	1.3%	0.2%	-0.9%	-1.3%	-1.7%	-1.6%	0.1%	0.0%
2023/24	7.2%	3.4%	0.7%	0.5%	-0.5%	-0.2%	-0.6%	-0.5%	-0.3%	0.0%

Timeliness and punctuality

For academic year 2023/24, the first monthly publication on the number of EMA applications was released in December 2023, relating to applications up until the end of November 2023. [Monthly updates during a given academic year are published as soon as possible on StatsWales](#), a few weeks following the end of a given month, and according to a planned and pre-announced series of publication dates. Data in this release refers to final 2023/24 data.

Accessibility and clarity

This statistical release is pre-announced and then published on the Statistics section of the Welsh Government website. It is accompanied by more detailed tables on StatsWales, a free to use service that allows visitors to view, manipulate, create and download data.

Comparability and coherence

Exceptionally, a student may continue to be eligible for EMA at 19 years of age. These are the approximate numbers of such students in recent years:

Number of 19 year old EMA recipients

2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
285	275	255	230	175	165	155	120	150

There can be a drop in approved EMA applications, often in the Spring of the academic year. This is due to the annual exercise carried out by SLC to sample check a proportion of those returning EMA applicants who have chosen to self certify their income and assess the application against the applicants' previous years income evidence. If the applicant later fails to provide evidence of household income (if requested) then they will be assumed to no longer be eligible for support.

Students meeting the eligibility criteria qualify for an award of £40 per week. EMA rate increased from £30 to £40, from April 2023.

[Northern Ireland \(Department for the Economy\)](#) and [Scotland \(Education maintenance allowances \(Scottish Government\)\)](#) have their own EMA schemes. The EMA scheme in England has been cancelled and has been closed to new applicants since 1st January 2011. This scheme has been replaced by a [bursary scheme \(Gov.UK\)](#) which focuses on students from less wealthy households.

Official statistics status

All official statistics should show the standards of the [Code of Practice for Statistics UK Statistics Authority](#).

These are accredited official statistics. They were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) in May 2022. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of accreditation. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with OSR promptly. Accreditation can be cancelled or suspended at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Our statistical practice is regulated by the OSR. OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

All of our statistics are produced and published in accordance with a number of statements and protocols to enhance trustworthiness, quality and value. These are set out in the Welsh Government's [Statement of Compliance](#).

These [accredited official statistics \(OSR\)](#) demonstrate the standards expected around trustworthiness, quality and public value in the following ways.

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Including infographics to highlight the main points on the front page
- Added the EMA Wales helpline number to the front page of the bulletin to help those who happen upon the bulletin while actually seeking claims advice
- Including additional contextual information such as trends in pupil numbers.
- Including a chart of successful applications by gender
- Including more policy context by introducing a description and link to the Well-being of Wales report
- Improved accessibility by expanding alt-text detail to all charts and tables.

You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the wellbeing goals and associated technical information is available in the [Wellbeing of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

Further details

The document is available at: <https://gov.wales/education-maintenance-allowances-ema-awarded-wales>

[Comparable monthly data and further detailed information on EMA applications can be found on the StatsWales website.](#)

[Further information about the EMA scheme can be found on the Student Finance Wales website.](#)

Related articles

The [Scottish Government](#) and [Northern Ireland Executive](#) publish statistics on recipients of EMA. [Student support in Wales](#).

List of tables and data items provided on StatsWales

- i. [Cumulative totals of applications for EMA by academic year and work stage \(StatsWales\)](#), which provides data on EMA application on a monthly basis. This annual publication finalises data at the end of August, the monthly data for August are therefore equal to the data presented in Charts 1 and 2 above.
- ii. [Approved applications by LEA \(Local Education Authority\) and type of award \(StatsWales\)](#). Only data for the £30 award has been provided since the academic year 2013/14 until April 2023 when the rate was increased to £40, other awards were discontinued in 2011/12.
- iii. [Approved applications by learning centre type, gender and type of award \(StatsWales\)](#).

ii.

Next update

November 2025

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to HigherEducationAndStudentFinance.Stats@gov.wales Open Government Licence

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