Welcome to the latest edition of the Skills Accounts e-bulletin.

A Skills Account is a personalised service that helps individuals take control of their learning and working lives. By encouraging individuals to register for a Skills Account you can help them:

- Choose the right course
- Find out how much funding may be available to support them
- Call or book an appointment with a trained careers adviser
- Create a secure action plan recording their skills and achievements
- Share their achievements with others

Trials of Skills Accounts began in the South East and East Midlands in September 2008. In March, Skills Accounts were introduced in the West Midlands to support JCP customers participating in the trial of the integrated employment and skills service. The aim of the trials is to ensure that what is being offered through a Skills Account meets with individuals’ needs and expectations.

On 1 August 2009, the second year of the Skills Accounts trials began. The objective of this second year is to expand Skills Accounts into new regions and target specific audiences.

This e-bulletin provides our partners and stakeholders with the latest information on Skills Accounts and will keep them updated during the trials.

If you would like additional names added to the distribution list or, if you would like to be removed from this list, please contact shagufta.mustafa@lsc.gov.uk

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1. NEWS FLASH – THE SKILLS VOUCHER
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The most feedback we have received from both learners and providers since the trials launched in September 2008 has been about the Skills Voucher. This feedback was crystallised in the evaluation report, the conclusions of which we shared with you in the July e-bulletin.

The Skills Voucher was designed as a motivational tool to identify the level of funding individuals might be eligible for – and to encourage them to visit a provider and enrol. Feedback has shown that learners like the information that the voucher provides but that in practice the voucher has not worked in the way that it was intended.

The decision has therefore been taken to phase out the Skills Voucher and replace it with an indication of funding for learning. This means that vouchers will no longer be used as part of the process of tracking individuals through the system. For the learner, they will no longer need to provide their learning provider with a copy of the voucher.

2. SKILLS ACCOUNTS TRIALS: REFLECTION AND PREPARATION
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The objective of the second year of the Skills Accounts trials is to expand the trials in new regions and with specific target audiences. It is therefore an ideal time to give you an overview of what has been achieved so far.

Over 20,000 accounts have been created during the first year through Strategic Learning Providers (SLPs), nextstep and the Careers Advice Service, along with those who have signed up online directly. We have been able to deliver over and above the amount of Skills Accounts that were needed in order to run a valid and robust evaluation of the trials.

The table below illustrates the most popular search terms from the Skills Accounts website during July 2009. We hope you find this information useful and we will continue to share such information on a regular basis.

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<th>SKILLS ACCOUNTS WEBSITE SEARCH RESULTS*</th>
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<td>Most popular mode of study</td>
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*Results based on July Skills Accounts MI report

In the first year of the trials there were twenty SLPs in the East Midlands and South East regions. From August, most FE providers in these regions have become SLPs, responsible for promoting and offering Skills Accounts.

In addition, the trials have been extended to the South West and Yorkshire & Humber regions. Here, like in the first year trials, a number of providers have been selected as SLPs so that we can ensure that systems are working and are well established before bringing all providers in the regions into the trials as SLPs.

During winter 2009, the trials will extend to the North West, West Midlands and South West with a targeted offering to learners with specific needs, such as Carers, and Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LLDD).
The ambition is to expand the trials to all nine regions by January 2010 when the North East, the East of England and London come on board. Again, further targeting of priority learner groups will continue in these and other regions as we move towards full, national rollout of Skills Accounts by the end of 2010.

Alongside the phased expansion of the trials, the website will continue to be enhanced and new functionality added. These changes are scheduled for October 2009 and March 2010, including the addition of an interactive skills diagnostic tool and learner statement enhancements, amongst other things.

Further details of the expanded trials and improvements to the website will be featured in future editions of the e-bulletin.

3. RESULTS FROM THE E-BULLETIN SURVEY
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In June we conducted a survey of the e-bulletin’s recipients in order to gauge how useful it is to you. First of all, we would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who participated in the survey. Your input and feedback is invaluable and will help us to enhance the e-bulletin moving forward.

The feedback that you gave us was mostly positive. The vast majority of surveyed recipients appreciate regular, up-to-date communications about Skills Accounts and see the e-bulletin as proficiently serving that need. On the whole, you like the format, when you receive it and have said that you will continue to read it. In particular information updating you on the trials’ progress, other providers’ experiences of Skills Accounts and how Skills Accounts sit within the wider Advancement Service were favoured. We will continue to provide such information on a regular basis.

There are, however, areas that you would like to know more about and where the e-bulletin can work harder. For example, there is a desire for even more information on the wider Advancement Service and the Skills Accounts trials and their future. Recipients would like to see more about how Skills Accounts benefit individuals, how they can promote those benefits and the benefits to their organisations.

In addition, some of you highlighted that the e-bulletin can sometimes be repetitive and light on content. You would prefer to not receive an e-bulletin if there is nothing new to say. Taking this point into account, we have identified months in the forthcoming year when we will not be issuing an e-bulletin but will instead provide you with other useful information, such as answers to the FAQs.

Based on this feedback, look out for the improved e-bulletin from September!

4. WEST MIDLANDS LEARNER FEEDBACK
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Since September 2008 the Integrated Employment and Skills trial has been taking place in the West Midlands region, of which Skills Accounts have been a component. As part of this trial, the Employability Skills Programme provides pre-employment skills training which includes qualifications up to Level 2 for literacy, numeracy or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

As part of the ESP, Skills Accounts have been offered to learners to empower them to take more control over their learning and working lives. Learners particularly like the independence that Skills Accounts give them in their job search, along with the evidence that they provide to help support their ASDAN employability awards. The
skills and interest assessment tool is very positively received, as is the CV builder which learners and tutors alike see as adding real benefits.

Tutors have reported that they have helped ESP learners to set up email accounts which has driven improved Information and Communication Technology (ICT) literacy and helped to support their job searches. Nevertheless, limited ICT literacy skills have been found to hinder learners and so this is something that the trials will seek to remedy, with tutors committed to continuing to help learners improve their ICT skills.

In next month’s edition of the e-bulletin we will be featuring a case study of one of the ESP learners so we can hear more about how this programme is benefiting learners!

5. TOP TIPS FOR PROVIDERS FOR THE ENROLMENT SEASON

TOP TIP ONE: make use of the Skills Accounts marketing materials which can be found on the LSC Campaign Resources Site to assist you in your conversations with learners.

TOP TIP TWO: feature Skills Accounts on your website, like Leicester College, encouraging learners to open their own Skills Account.

TOP TIP THREE: make Skills Accounts an integrated part of the enrolment process like Isle of Wight College where Skills Accounts are being promoted by the Student Services team so that they are an integrated part of enrolment, rather than a “bolt on”.

TOP TIP FOUR: tell learners about Skills Accounts early in the conversation, like Northampton College, where advisers in the enrolment centre inform learners about Skills Accounts and provide them with materials such as the learner leaflet so that they have something to take away with them.

TOP TIP FIVE: if learners need more help, show them how to open their Skills Account or advise them to call the Careers Advice Service (0800 100 900) or visit their nearest nextstep. For example, Eastleigh College has been running one-on-one guidance sessions to help learners to open and understand how to use their Skills Account.

6. SUPPORTING MATERIALS & HELPLINE

There is a range of Skills Accounts materials available for you to download from the LSC Campaign Resources Site:

You can use these materials to support your own campaigns and communications. Once you have registered on the site you will have access to collateral and materials relating to all of the different LSC campaigns.
Supporting materials for Skills Accounts include:
- DL size leaflet for learners
- A3 posters
- Banner stands
- PowerPoint presentation templates
- Web and advertising copy

Please contact your regional representative to order hard copies of the leaflets, posters and banner stands.

**Helpline**
The helpline offers support to all Skills Accounts stakeholders that would like further information or support. It can be contacted on 0207 413 3400.

**7. CONTACT INFORMATION**
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For further information about the Skills Accounts trials in your region please contact your regional LSC Skills Accounts team.

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We hope you have found this edition of the Skills Accounts e-bulletin useful! If you have any queries or questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.