LEARNERS IN CONTROL IN FIRST TRIALS OF LEARNER ACCOUNTS'

- Learner Accounts give learners greater choice and control over their learning
- Creates demand-led learning that meets the needs of employers, young people and adults more effectively

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Learners in some parts of the South East and East Midlands will be the first to trial the Government’s new Learner Accounts, which will give learners greater choice and control over their learning. Learners will receive independent advice on training options up-front. Once they have signed up for a course they will receive a written statement confirming the cost of the course and the amount that the state and individual or employer will be expected to pay for it. As they progress through their learning journey, students will receive regular updated statements.

All learners with accounts will be able to call on independent advice and guidance to help them choose the right course and training provider to meet their needs. There will be increased choice as to where they can get the learning they want.

Trials to test the accounts will begin in September 2007 and up to 4,000 accounts will be available to help learners over 19 gain full Level 3 qualifications, including National Vocational Qualifications, A levels or BTEC National Diplomas.

Once enrolled, students will receive an account statement setting out details of the learning, the costs of that learning and the contribution, if any, they are expected to make. As they approach the end of their learning programme they will be provided with details of further development opportunities to progress their learning.

Learner Accounts build on the commitments outlined in last year’s FE White Paper “Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances” and the recent Leitch Review of Skills. They also demonstrate the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC’s) ambition to making learning truly
demand-led so that it meets the needs of employers, young people and adults more effectively.

Welcoming the trials Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education said:

“We are moving to a further education and training system driven by employer and learner choices. We warmly welcome Lord Leitch’s endorsement of our direction of travel on a demand-led system. With the new national employer training scheme Train to Gain and the development of Learner Accounts we are working towards our ambition to deliver truly world class skills to help us compete globally with the best in the world. These trials are an important step forward on that journey.”

Mark Haysom, Chief Executive of the LSC, said:

“We are committed to providing the most effective education and training system that meets the needs of all employers and individuals. These demand-led Learner Accounts will help to increase the choice of learning available at Level 3 and improve the achievement and satisfaction level of learners. Better skilled and more satisfied learners will in turn help us to create a more competitive workforce.”

Henry Ball, LSC Regional Director in the South East and Verity Bullough, LSC Regional Director in the East Midlands, comment:

“Learner Accounts will undoubtedly play an important role in helping adults in our region upgrade and develop their skills in the near future. We welcome the opportunity to test this exciting new initiative in consultation with learners, training providers and delivery partners.”

Learner Accounts will be available through colleges of further education and other providers of high quality education and training who have satisfied the LSC’s quality
assurance process. The LSC will be working closely with local colleges and training providers to develop effective and non-bureaucratic systems to support Learner Accounts and widen the choice to learners.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

1. The Further Education White Paper ‘Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances’ (March, 2006) Chapter 3 - Page 35 announced we will introduce a new system of learner accounts for adult learners. There will be trials of learner accounts starting in 2007/08 and there will be careful evaluation of the pilots before decisions are taken about expansion.

2. The trials will be focused on economic growth areas in the South East of Southampton/Portsmouth, Brighton, Thames Gateway, Crawley, Basingstoke, Reading, Oxford, Milton Keynes and Medway. In the East Midlands the trials will be in Nottingham City and three areas of Lincolnshire and Rutland – Boston, South Holland and Rutland. They will provide around 4,000 learner accounts at a cost of £10 million. The value of each account will vary depending upon the learning programme the individual chooses and whether they are expected to pay fees or not.

3. Detailed discussions and consultations will take place with providers in those areas to refine the approaches to learner accounts to be tested in the trials. The trials will be evaluated as they progress and will be expanded in scale in the second year (2008/09).

4. Accounts work best where there is an informed and demanding customer group, able and motivated to exercise real choice. That is why we will start with learners seeking full level 3 qualifications. For individuals, learner accounts mean:

i. access to high quality, independent information, advice and guidance on career choices, courses at Level 3 and providers, particularly via an extended Learndirect telephone service providing in depth personal support and on-line;

ii. receipt of an information pack setting out contact details and options;

iii. a wider range of providers to choose from;

iv. once their choice has been made regular statements setting out details of provider, course, duration, total cost of tuition, state contribution, individual’s/employers contribution, learner support provided, sources of further information;
v. support and advice, both during and on completion of their course, to help learners achieve the qualifications they are aiming for and progress into work and further learning.

5. The Leitch Review of Skills recommends increasing choice and giving individuals real purchasing power by channelling all adult vocational further education funding for individuals through Learner Accounts by 2010. This is clearly ambitious and challenging and the trials will have to be carefully evaluated to inform decisions of rolling out across all levels of LSC funded adult learning.

6. The trial areas, South East and East Midlands, where selected based on a range of criteria, for instance the need to cover different areas of the country and the need to test different size areas to ascertain whether accounts work in tightly defined localities as well as larger ones.

7. For further information on national development of learner accounts contact Stephen Gardner (Stephen.Gardner@lsc.gov.uk). For information on the trials in South East contact Peter Marsh (Peter.Marsh@lsc.gov.uk) and in East Midlands contact Karen Woodward (Karen.Woodward@lsc.gov.uk).

Learning and Skills Council:
The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

LSC Website: www.lsc.gov.uk

All public enquiries please contact:
LSC Helpdesk: 0870 900 6800

All media enquiries please contact:
LSC Press Office
Ann Gill 0247 682 3515  ann.s.gill@lsc.gov.uk
Emily Towers 0247 682 5793  emily.towers@lsc.gov.uk