LEARN SOMETHING NEW AND BEAT THE SEPTEMBER BLUES!

- A dismal summer, money worries and the need for a confidence boost all make September the ideal month to learn a new skill

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Brits have put up with a lot this summer: one of the wettest summers on record across the UK\(^1\), dramatically rising food and fuel costs, and even the feel good factor surrounding the Olympics has worn off. So, as the British ‘summer’ draws to an end and the kids head back to school, the whole nation is in need of a boost.

According to research released by the Learning and Skills Council, learning a new skill or starting a new course could be the ideal way of giving people that much needed lift. The research shows that over three quarters of learners (80 per cent) feel more happy and confident having learnt a new skill, and over 85 per cent feel more creative and prepared to try new things having started a course\(^2\).

Anjula Mutanda, psychologist and life coach, agrees: “This summer has been pretty grim. As we approach autumn and the nights start to draw in, we’re all a bit down in the dumps. Starting something new, like a new course, is a great way of giving yourself a boost. It’s really easy to get out of the habit of learning and, as that drive weakens, so does our self-confidence and motivation. People find it easier to stay in their comfort zones, but learning something new will give you a real sense of self-belief.

“So why not try something to brighten up not just the coming months but your entire future? With so many people enrolling on new courses this month, what’s stopping you? After the summer we’ve had, learning a new skill could be the best pick me up to take you into winter feeling revived and energised!”

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\(^1\) The Met Office, September 2008
\(^2\) National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007: pp 18-19
Past research from the Learning and Skills Council has also shown that learning can give your love life a boost; with just under two thirds of learners (60 per cent) admitting to finding love while learning; and it need not be a short term boost, with nearly a quarter of those (18 per cent) who found love whilst in higher education remaining in one of those relationships today.

In addition to today’s findings, the Association of Colleges says that early signs indicate that colleges have been successful in enrolling students on further education and vocational courses – showing that people have a great appetite for wanting to take up something new.

Anjula Mutanda continues: “This year has been tough on people and the ongoing, gloomy economic news is really taking its toll on the nation. Research has shown that money worries can lead to stress, which can affect our outlook, relationships and work – so it's no wonder that people are a bit down in the dumps!

“However, September is the perfect time to take control of our lives and re-tune ourselves to a positive psychological mindset. Having a new challenge or course to focus on can serve as excellent preparation to combat the winter blues. Instead of wallowing, and perhaps engaging in behaviours that could contribute to making you feel low, such as comfort eating, too much TV and not enough exercise; enrolling in a new course could provide you with a brand new positive focus and challenge.

“Learning a new skill can also mean meeting new people, getting a job, or securing that much-wanted promotion or pay-rise. Simply improving on the skills you already have could help increase self-esteem, and improve confidence.”

Skills Minister, David Lammy says: “The Government wants everyone to have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. We’ve increased investment in learning for young people and adults, and through working closely with further education colleges and employers, we’ve made it easier than ever before to get skills training.”

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3 Research conducted by ICM amongst a nationally representative sample of UK adults aged 18+, February 2008
Chris Banks, Chairman, Learning and Skills Council, agrees and says: “Learning a new skill is a sound investment in so many ways, both in the long term and in the short term too. Not only does research show that gaining a new qualification can increase your annual income by £2,000-£3,000\(^4\); but learning will also improve your confidence and the way you feel about yourself. It’s about taking the future into our hands and improving ourselves, and with so many ways to learn, there’s something to suit everyone.

“Everybody has the right to learn, and we encourage everyone to look at their options, especially when both the short and long term benefits are so attractive. So as the kids go back to school, the LSC is encouraging adults to reap the rewards of education themselves, showing that it’s never too late to learn.”

The Learning and Skills Council has a wide variety of training and funding advice available for people who are interested in updating their skills or obtaining a new qualification. With so much support available, what’s stopping you from updating your skills? To find out more about training and whether there are any funding options available for the course you’ve chosen, talk to your employer or visit lsc.gov.uk/inourhands

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Notes to Editors:

\(^4\) Based on the Labour Force Survey, 2007
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.

The LSC offers a host of support services to help those who are already in the workforce, or are about to enter the workforce, to gain the skills they need to succeed, secure their future or grow their income. For example, you could receive the Adult Learning Grant (ALG) for your decided course, a grant designed as a helping hand for adults thinking about learning but worried about the financial barriers standing in their way. ALG provides low income adult learners with up to £30 a week to help with the extra costs of learning. Since the grant became available, over 43,000 people have received ALG. You could also access training at work through the LSC's flagship programme for employers, Train to Gain.