SKILLS ACCOUNTS E-BULLETIN
NOVEMBER 2009

SPECIAL EDITION:
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Edition Seventeen
Welcome to the Skills Accounts e-bulletin.

The e-bulletin is one of the ways in which we update partners and stakeholders as the trials develop. For further information about Skills Accounts, please visit http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/skillsaccounts

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As indicated in the previous edition of the bulletin, we are taking the opportunity this month to provide you with information on the wide range of Frequently Asked Questions we have received during the year. Within this, we include the highlights for the future of Skills Accounts that were announced in the Skills White Paper, *Skills for Growth* on 11 November 2009.

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1. UPDATED SKILLS ACCOUNTS WEBSITE
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The Skills Accounts website has recently been updated and now includes:

- Access to a variety of pages and tools prior to logging in or registering for a Skills Account.
- Enhancements to the Skills Accounts website usability enabling individuals to search for products via the Customer Journey.
- A Skills Diagnostic Tool - a web-based tool that provides an objective assessment of the customer’s strengths, skills, abilities and areas for development in key competency areas which underpin success at work.
- Funding Entitlement tools - Government funding eligibility checkers to enable individuals to understand and access government contributions towards learning. Also includes information relating to:
  - Adult Learner Entitlement
  - Adult Learning Grant (ALG)
  - Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work (FCTLW)
  - In certain regions targeted offers for low income families and those with caring responsibilities.

We consulted with learners when developing the new layout so take a look at the updated website and let us know your views. Visit the ‘Contact Us’ section on the Skills Account website and leave comments/feedback on your experiences of the service.

2. SKILLS FOR GROWTH SETS OUT THE FUTURE OF SKILLS ACCOUNTS
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On 11 November 2009, the Government published its national skills strategy, Skills for Growth. The White Paper outlines a number of new announcements concerning the future of Skills Accounts which includes:

- Trebling the number of learning institutions that will offer Skills Accounts to 1,500
- Introducing Skills Accounts for every learner, putting learner’s choice at the forefront in order to drive improvements and quality in the skills system
- Adults accessing training through Train to Gain and Apprenticeships, and all young people when they turn 19
- Giving learners more information on the quality of courses through a simple ‘traffic light’ system and ‘balanced scorecard’
- Allowing learners to signal where their demands have not been met so that providers can respond to unexpected or specialist areas of demand more quickly
- Ensuring that Skills Accounts play a greater role in providing personalised support to Jobcentre Plus customers so that they can access a wide range of training opportunities guided by the expertise of Personal Advisers

To read the full skills strategy click here.

3. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
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We continue to receive lots of questions and feedback from partners and learners; we hope the following answers are helpful. Links are provided to the full range of questions on the websites.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY LEARNERS

1. Which regions are offering Skills Accounts?
In the first year of the trials, Skills Accounts were only offered in the South East and East Midlands regions as part of the universal offer. Since March 2009 Skills Accounts have also been trialled as part of the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials in the West Midlands.
New regions are being brought into the trials incrementally during year two. The South West and Yorkshire & the Humber joined in October 2009 and the North West joined earlier this month. From January 2010, Skills Accounts will extend into the East of England, North East and London regions and will broaden to include the universal offer in the West Midlands.

2. Who is eligible for a Skills Account?
Skills Accounts are available to all adults in England aged 19 years and over. In certain areas the service is also available to Jobcentre Plus clients aged 18 years old and over. There is no upper age limit for eligibility.

3. I am having problems with the website. Who can help me?
If you are having technical problems with the website then please complete the online technical support form which can be found in the ‘Contact Us’ section of the website. You can also contact the Careers Advice Service between 8am – 10pm, 7 days a week on:

- Telephone 0800 100 900
- Typetalk 18001 0800 100 900
- Minicom 08000 568 865

Alternatively, you can provide feedback directly to the Skills Account team which will help shape the future of the service. Visit the ‘Contact Us’ section on the Skills Account website and leave comments/feedback on your experiences of the service.

4. What courses can I access through a Skills Account?
Through your Skills Account you can access a wide range of courses which may be fully or partially funded by the Government. You can use the ‘Course Search’ tool on the website to identify which courses are available.

Certain courses, such as Higher Education courses which are not funded by the LSC, are not currently included in the course search. If you require further information and assistance about these alternative level courses, then please contact the Careers Advice Service on 0800 100 900 or visit the Careers Advice Service website. You can also visit your local nextstep for more help.

5. What will a Skills Account give me?
A Skills Account brings together all the information, support and services you might need in order to make informed choices about learning and training. Through a Skills Account, learners are able to access:

- a **Course Finder** which helps you find out what courses are available in your area so that you can choose the provider, course and time that suits you
- a **Skills and Interests Assessment Tool** which helps you to identify the skills you need to manage your career and working life
- a **Qualifications Calculator** that details your current learning achievements and helps you to plan your next steps
- **Careers Advice Job Profiles** which allows you to search across a range of information about the types of job you may be interested in
- an **Unverified Learning Record** which allows you to record previous learning achievements, hobbies and interests and add any courses you are currently undertaking
- a **Verified Learning Record**, verified by a learning provider, which contains details of your past achievements and qualifications to date
- a **Funding Indicator** that allows you to estimate the level of government funding that you may be eligible for. This will be set against contributions that you make yourself
- a **Learner Statement** which shows the actual funding the Government has put towards your learning
- a web-based **Skills Diagnostic Tool** that provides an objective assessment of your strengths, skills and abilities and areas for development in key competencies which underpin success at work. As a result of a diagnostic report, an Action Plan can then be produced
• a Skills Action Plan which is a personal development plan that is created following completion of the Skills Health Check and Skills Diagnostic with a nextstep adviser. It can be viewed as part of the Skills Account, if applicable.

Access the full range of questions for individuals here.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY PROVIDERS

6. How can an individual open a Skills Account?
A Skills Account can be opened in a number of ways:
1. Online through www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts
2. By visiting a nextstep adviser. nextstep can provide additional support to open a Skills Account, either through the Skills Diagnostic Tool or through the Skills Account website
3. Through some colleges and training providers in the trial regions that are offering Skills Accounts to targeted groups of learners
4. By calling the national Careers Advice Service helpline (0800 100 900) to register interest in a Skills Account
5. By visiting ESP providers in certain Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trial areas who can support individuals to open a Skills Account

7. Is eligibility for a Skills Account the same as eligibility for learning/funding?
No it is not the same. All adults in England are eligible for a Skills Account.

One of the key objectives of Skills Accounts is to enable individuals to understand and access the Government funding that they might be entitled to in order to follow a particular course. Whilst normal LSC funding eligibility applies, this entitlement will vary, depending on the individual’s age, current level of learning, residency and course interest. The value given on the Indication of Government Funding search results is derived from the subject and course information stored in the national Learning Aims Database (LAD).

For the current trials, the Government’s contributions highlighted through Skills Accounts focus primarily on the Adult Learner Responsive and Learner Support budgets. As the trials expand, other LSC funding routes may also be included.

8. What happened to the Skills Voucher?
The purpose of the Skills Voucher was to provide an indication of the amount of money the Government could invest in an individual for a chosen course. The aim of the Voucher was purely motivational, designed to inform the learner of the true cost of their further education.

Feedback from learners and providers throughout the 2008/09 trials prompted a review of the way in which the Voucher was used. It was clear from early evaluations that many individuals found the funding information displayed on the Voucher useful but learners and providers found it confusing.

Learners can still check their eligibility but we are not describing this as a voucher nor are we encouraging them to present this to their provider.

9. What is the future of Skills Accounts?
Skills Accounts have been successfully trialled over the academic year 2008/09 and over 30,000 applications for Skills Accounts have been processed. This demonstrates a clear demand from learners for a service that empowers them to take control of their learning and working lives.

In the short term we will continue to expand the service across England. Skills Accounts will be tested with new audiences during the second year of the trials, including Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LLDD), via the Offenders’ Learning and Skills Service, with carers and those on working tax credits and within Train to Gain, so that we can develop a service that empowers and meets the needs of all learners.
10. How can I get involved with Skills Accounts?
We are currently working with regional partners and other stakeholders to extend the trials as outlined in question one. Final timings and the scope of further enhancements to the trials are still under discussion and will be finalised over the next few months. For further information please contact your regional LSC office.

Please continue to raise your questions via the Skills Accounts website. A full list of FAQs can be found here on the Skills Accounts pages of the LSC website.

4. SUPPORTING MATERIALS & HELPLINE
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A wide range of Skills Accounts materials are 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:
- *NEW* A5 size leaflet for learners (LSC-P-NAT-090170)
- A3 posters (LSC-I-NAT-090156)
- Banner stands
- PowerPoint presentation templates
- Web and advertising copy

To order hard copies of the leaflets and posters please email lsc@granbymarketing.com quoting the publication number provided above, quantity required and delivery address. For the purpose of monitoring stock levels, please copy your regional LSC contact into the request.

Please contact your regional representative to order 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.

5. 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 trust that 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.

There will be no edition of the e-bulletin in December. May we take this opportunity to thank you all for your continuing support during the Skills Accounts trials. We look forward to working with you again in 2010.