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

Skills Accounts will help individuals take control of their learning and working lives. Skills Accounts provide a personalised service that allows learners to access a range of careers advice as well as information about how to improve their skills and access financial support.

Trials of Skills Accounts began in the South East and East Midlands on 29 September 2008. The aim of the first year of the trials is to ensure that what is being offered through a Skills Account meets with learners’ needs and expectations.

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

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

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1. NEW WEBSITE FUNCTIONALITIES GO LIVE THIS MONTH!
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As outlined in last month’s edition of the e-bulletin, new website functionalities are due to go live at the end of this month (April). Learners will be able to create their own personal online learning record. Through this, learners will be able to add details of their previous learning achievements and any courses they are currently undertaking. The learning record allows learners to track their skills development.

The April release will also introduce a tool which will enable Skills Accounts users to identify the funding that the government may have been making to help them improve their skills. The tool also details the financial contributions that they themselves may have made towards their learning.

As the trial evolves, we are keen to ensure that the website develops as a useful and demand-led portal, which meets individuals’ needs and expectations. The next notable improvements to the website will take place in early summer when many more functions will become available. These include:

• Access to a Learning Record showing verified learning achievements
• Availability of a Skills Action Plan
• Availability of a verified Learner Statement showing financial contributions
• Enhanced Careers Advice Service contact functions
• The ability to reset passwords within the Skills Accounts website

We will be giving you more detailed information on all of these new functions in forthcoming editions of the e-bulletin, so watch this space!

2. THE ROLE OF PARTNERS – A VIEW FROM NEXTSTEP
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nextstep is playing a crucial role in the Skills Accounts trials. GuideLine Career Services manages the nextstep information, advice and guidance contract for the East Midlands region which includes Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Rutland, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire. It has a network of 66 sub-contractors spread across the region who have recently become involved in raising awareness of Skills Accounts and supporting clients to open them as part of the Skills Accounts trial. Here Claire Phillips, from GuideLine Career Services, shares her experiences of the trials:

“The number of Skills Accounts opened by clients is building and we are getting a large amount of feedback from sub-contractors about how this is progressing. We have received positive comments about the experience as well as details about a number of issues, which is the purpose of the trials so that we can develop a service that meets individuals’ needs and is easy to use.

We are also collecting evidence of good practice and one sub-contractor explained that their organisation used Skills Accounts as part of its progression advice for clients who are about to finish their Advanced Apprenticeships.

The feedback that we have received is used to inform the regional LSC team via e-mails and monthly meetings. These comments and issues are flagged so that the LSC can continue to develop the Skills Account portal and make it as user-friendly as possible.

GuideLine has also recently taken part in a national consultation which was conducted by RCU on behalf of the LSC. We are currently waiting for the next phase of Skills Accounts to begin when it is rolled out to all the local colleges. This wider coverage will mean that Skills Accounts will be increasingly helpful to clients from all across the East Midlands region. We look forward to this development.”
3. MARKETING SKILLS ACCOUNTS – A PROVIDER’S EXPERIENCE
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“Skills Accounts are providing learners with a really positive experience,” says Roland White of Isle of Wight College, one of 12 strategic learning providers in the South East Skills Accounts trial. Isle of Wight College has been at pains to ensure that Skills Accounts have become an integrated part of its existing enrolment processes so that, as Roland points out, “Skills Accounts become an embedded part in the enrolment paperwork and do not become a ‘bolt on’. By making sure that Skills Accounts are introduced at the beginning of the process, then staff and students can roll with it!”

Isle of Wight College’s experience of Skills Accounts has been very constructive so far, with commendable numbers of learners signing up for Skills Accounts since the trials launched in September 2008. As Skills Accounts are all about helping learners make informed choices, the college took the decision to promote Skills Accounts through its student services team. “We could have placed the promotion of Skills Accounts with either the student services team or the curriculum team, but it was felt that Skills Accounts fitted more comfortably with the work that the student services team is pursuing. Of course we keep the curriculum team up to speed on how Skills Accounts are developing but student services champion them. The team have actively been using the Skills Accounts marketing materials when they have been talking to learners in their conversations about advice and guidance.”

In last month’s e-bulletin, we told you about additional funding now available for Level 3 learners. Isle of Wight College is helping to promote Level 3 funding through Skills Accounts and has found that access to funding for continued learning is being well received. According to Roland, “the benefits of Skills Accounts are being made even clearer to learners as through their Skills Account they are able to tap into something that is not available elsewhere or through another route. This is important as it helps to demonstrate the benefits of Skills Accounts to learners, as I am not always sure that learners fully understand them. As the trials evolve I am sure this will change.”

Roland is optimistic about the future: “So far people have genuinely worked together to make the trials successful. Going forward we need to ensure that there is a continued joined-up approach as Skills Accounts begin to touch other areas and are developed further.”

We would like to hear more from you about what you are doing to market and communicate Skills Accounts. Please send your examples and experiences to Fatiha Laauich at fatiha.laauich@lsc.gov.uk.

4. THE NLD – PREPARING FOR SEPTEMBER ENROLMENTS
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At this time of the year, learning providers are preparing for September enrolments. It is therefore vital that the National Learning Directory (NLD) is updated with any new courses or amendments to older courses that you are planning.

As you know, the NLD is crucial to the success of the Skills Accounts trials but it is also an important tool for you to promote your courses to prospective learners. Therefore, we strongly encourage all learning providers in the trial regions to ensure that their information on the NLD is as complete and accurate as possible.

If you require background information about the NLD please refer to the January edition of the Skills Accounts e-bulletin which can be found here: Skills Accounts January E-Bulletin

More information is available from: http://www.advice-resources.co.uk/learningproviders/newproviders/cmhelp.pdf/
5. SUPPORTING MATERIALS & HELPLINE
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Supporting materials for Skills Accounts include a DL size leaflet for learners, A3 posters, banner stands, as well as Powerpoint presentation templates, web and advertising copy. All of these are available for download from the LSC Campaign Resources Site:

lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources

Helpline
The helpline offers support to all Skills Accounts stakeholders that would like further information or support. It can be contacted on skillscampaign@lsc.gov.uk or 020 7413 3400.

6. MORE 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.