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

Skills Accounts will help individuals take control of their learning and working life. The ambition is that Skills Accounts will be a personalised service that allows learners to access a range of careers advice and information about how to improve their skills and access financial support.

Trials of Skills Accounts began in the South East and East Midlands on the 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 monthly e-bulletin will provide all our partners with the latest information on Skills Accounts and 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 sally.askew@lsc.gov.uk

In the fifth edition of this e-bulletin:

1. Feedback from the trials so far
2. The aacs

Archived information
3. Skills Account – the background
4. Skills Accounts – what are they?
5. Skills Accounts Trials
6. nextstep and the Careers Advice Helpline come onboard
7. Providers – benefiting from Skills Accounts
8. Skills Accounts Training – seminars and workshops
9. Supporting materials & Helpline
10. More information
1. FEEDBACK FROM THE TRIALS SO FAR
(back to table of contents)

On 29 September twenty strategic partners in the two trial regions – the East Midlands and the South East – began offering Skills Accounts to learners enrolling at their college. These learners have then been registered for a Skills Account by the strategic partners. Learners will be sent a letter asking them to log on to the Skills Accounts website, as soon as the site is live so that they can complete the registration process.

Learners have been signing up for a Skills Account for nearly two months now in the trial regions. The following snapshots from the East Midlands and the South East give you a taste of what has been going on:

Activity in the East Midlands

“During November, the LSC East Midlands Skills Account project team have been busy delivering a series of on-site training sessions to strategic partners plus training events for all nextstep sub-contractors, on an area by area basis. These sessions have been used to demonstrate and prepare teams before the portal goes live.”

“In addition we are holding briefing sessions for Strategic Learning Provider’s marcomms teams. These sessions will advise on: what are Skills Accounts?; who they are aimed at?; how people access a Skills Account; and where they go to apply. We are also signposting them to the promotional materials available and sources of additional information such as national helplines, websites, etc.”

“What has been happening to all those posters? Well, at Leicester College they are displaying them in their information centres across their 3 main campuses and in the student services areas. They have also looked at how they can communicate to learners about Skills Accounts from their Customer Service Centre which manages all the telephone and email enquiries into the College.”

Margaret Warren, Director of Marketing & Communications, LSC East Midlands

Activity in the South East

“As we approached the launch of the Skills Accounts website it has become increasingly important to ensure that awareness surrounding Skills Accounts is raised among all potential stakeholders in the South East. With this in mind briefing sessions have been taking place across the region to a wide range of stakeholders. We have also been working very closely with nextstep to ensure Skills Accounts are offered within the new nextstep service.”

“As Skills Accounts are a key component of the developing adult advancement and careers service it has been vital that we work closely with nextstep to embed Skills Accounts within the core service they offer. Working closely with stakeholders will continue throughout the trial to ensure that we are able to effectively consider feedback and continue to refine the Skills Accounts process.”

Ben Blackledge, Skills Support Adviser, LSC South East

Many Learning Providers within both trial regions have recently updated their course information on the National Learning Directory (NLD). In the Skills Accounts Trials the NLD will be used to provide course information for learners, so it is essential that all Learning Providers ensure that their course information is accurate and actively maintained to enable account holders to be able to view the full range of courses available in their area. We would ask that all Learning Providers ensure that their information is completely up to date. Please see item 7 for information on updating the NLD.
If you are a strategic partner or a learning provider in the trial regions we would welcome your feedback and suggestions about your experiences of Skills Accounts so far. If you would like to provide input for future editions of the e-bulletin, please email them to Sally Askew on sally.askew@lsc.gov.uk.

2. THE ADULT ADVANCEMENT & CAREERS SERVICE (aacs)  
(back to table of contents)

The aacs prospectus - Shaping the future – a new Adult Advancement and Careers Service for England - was published on 29 October setting out how the new service will develop.

At the launch event, John Denham announced the names and locations of ten prototype advisory services across England whose work will inform the launch of the aacs in 2010.

The prototypes will run for two years, testing a range of approaches to establishing local partnerships to act as both outreach points and sources of wider advice on getting on in work. The prototypes will:

- explore how the voluntary and community sector can contribute to these approaches and work with partners; and
- carry out outreach activity in the community and in a wide range of settings.

They will develop approaches which address the needs of those in work, particularly the low skilled and low paid, and those out of work needing advice and support to move into sustainable employment.

The prospectus is available to download here.

3. SKILLS ACCOUNTS – THE BACKGROUND  
(back to table of contents)

Why Skills Accounts?
Improved skills levels are vital to the UK’s future economic prosperity. With 74 per cent of the 2020 workforce having already completed compulsory education, and figures showing that one in seven of the UK’s working population is without qualifications, the need to support and empower people to improve their skills levels has never been more urgent.

History
In his 2006 report “Prosperity for all in a global economy: world class skills”, Lord Leitch first recommended that public funding for skills should be routed through a learner account. The Government acted upon his recommendation and in “World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England” outlined its intention to introduce Skills Accounts in 2008/2009.

The Government then set out its long-term vision for Skills Accounts in its June 2008 Work Skills command paper, stating that: “from age 18, depending on existing qualifications, all young adults who do not go to university will now have access to a range of entitlements up to Level 3 to spend on their vocational training, be it at a local college, training provider or in work through Train to Gain through a Skills Account. For those not already qualified at this level, these entitlements would be typically worth some £7,000, but the actual amount would vary on the courses chosen.” In addition, building on the Prime Minister’s previous commitment, “from 2010, Skills Accounts will also ensure that apprentices from age 18 receive an Apprenticeship Credit towards the costs.”
4. SKILLS ACCOUNTS – WHAT ARE THEY?

The ambition is that Skills Accounts will be a personalised service that allows learners to access a range of information and careers advice about how to improve their skills and access financial support. Learners will be able to access:

a. the nextstep and Careers Advice Service, which provide information and advice so that they can understand their options when making decisions about their skills and careers;
b. a Skills Voucher that will indicate their eligibility for public funding and show the value of their chosen course;

A unique feature of Skills Accounts will be the Skills Voucher. Based on the information provided by learners, a personal Skills Voucher will detail the approximate funding available, if they are eligible. They can then use this Skills Voucher towards the cost of a course of their choice at an accredited learning provider. Taking into account the lessons learnt through Individual Learning Accounts (ILA), funding will flow from the LSC to providers with payment mechanisms based on standard LSC processes. Only providers approved by the LSC will access funding, so learners can be assured of the quality.

The usual LSC quality assurance tests will apply and eligibility for support is in line with existing policies and entitlements.

In the future, each Skills Account holder will have a unique learner number (ULN), enabling them to build a verified record of their learning for the future.

Skills Accounts will enable careers advisers (currently delivered through nextstep and the Careers Advice Service, but from 2010 through the adult advancement and careers service) and LSC-accredited providers to deliver an integrated and customer-friendly service to learners, which will allow them to provide the highest level of professional advice available.

**How can Skills Accounts be accessed?**

Skills Accounts will be accessible via a number of different access points, including a web-based service. During the trial phase there will be substantial testing of access points and an incremental roll-out of each of these. From September individuals were offered a Skills Account when they enrolled on a course with one of 20 strategic partners in the two trial regions. When the online Skills Account portal goes live, individuals will also be able to open an account themselves; through their local nextstep provider; or through the national Careers Advice Service. Additionally in due course, individuals referred from Jobcentre Plus advisers to local nextstep advisers will be able to open Skills Accounts, in relevant Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trial areas.

Individuals who have registered with the National Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching System (NAVMS) and who live within the trial areas may be offered the opportunity to sign up for a Skills Account.
5. SKILLS ACCOUNTS TRIALS
(back to table of contents)

Ahead of national roll-out, which is planned for 2010/11, Skills Accounts are initially being trialled in a number of different regions.

Trials are being undertaken in two clusters. The first set of Skills Accounts trials is a universal offer aimed at all adults. The second trial is aimed at Jobcentre Plus clients only, within the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials.

The universal offer started in September and is being trialled in the East Midlands and South East. The Skills Accounts trials for Jobcentre Plus clients as part of the IES trials will commence in December. All of the trials will be ongoing up until the national roll-out in 2010/11.

The West Midlands was the first region to start the IES trials. They began trialling the newly developed Skills Health Check on 29 September with Jobcentre Plus customers who will access it through the nextstep service. Further areas involved within the IES trials will begin to offer Skills Accounts as the trials progress.

The trials’ purpose
The purpose of these trials is to test arrangements for providing learners with a high quality Skills Account service and test the systems that will deliver it prior to national roll out. We will also be using the trials to develop the programme into the best possible resource for stakeholders and learners. Feedback from all stakeholders will be of great importance to establish what works well and what does not; what needs improving, gaps in the system or service; and testing integration between the different interdependent trials and organisations.

Evaluation of Skills Accounts will begin in autumn 2008, initially with qualitative interviews with over 50 stakeholders involved in the trials. Stakeholders, including learning providers and nextstep providers, will be contacted early on in order for their views to be incorporated into the development of Skills Accounts for the future.

A longitudinal quantitative study involving interviews with over 1,000 Skills Account holders will commence later into the trial with a second wave of questioning occurring a year later.

6. ACCESS TO SKILLS ACCOUNTS THROUGH NEXTSTEP AND THE CAREERS ADVICE SERVICE
(back to table of contents)

In the latter part of 2008, nextstep and the Careers Advice Service within the trial areas, will begin offering Skills Accounts to their clients. They will provide advice, support and guidance about how their clients within these areas can open a Skills Account.

Training sessions are being planned and provider guidelines and supporting information is currently being developed and distributed to nextstep and Careers Advice Service colleagues to ensure that they have all the information and tools needed to start delivering Skills Accounts to their clients.
7. PROVIDERS – BENEFITING FROM SKILLS ACCOUNTS
(back to table of contents)

We want all providers in the trial regions to benefit from Skills Accounts. Twenty strategic partners have already volunteered to trial the system in the East Midlands and the South East but all providers need to be aware that they may encounter learners with a Skills Voucher who wish to study at their institution.

During this initial phase, relatively small numbers of learners will be registered for Skills Accounts. Regional providers that are not part of the trials will receive information about the progress of the trials. They will also receive advice about what they should do if they are approached by a learner who has opened a Skills Account and printed off their Skills Voucher.

During the first year of the trial all FE providers within the trial areas could encounter learners with a Skills Voucher. These learners will already have opened a Skills Account and should therefore be taken through normal enrolment processes.

The NLD – a crucial resource
For the 2008/09 Skills Accounts Trials, the National Learning Directory (NLD) will be used to provide information for learners through their Skills Account, so it is essential that all providers, in the trial areas especially, ensure that their course information is accurate and actively maintained on the National Learning Directory. The NLD is a free service for providers to market their courses to as wide an audience as possible. In 2007/08, the NLD generated over 13.5 million searches to over 80 websites accessing the database, which means free advertising for providers, courses getting noticed by more people and ultimately more people into learning. Providers can upload and maintain their details using Course Manager:

http://www.learning-directory.co.uk/pls/cgi-bin-data/page_pls_cp_login?s_type=LD

Course Manager is the technical system within the NLD, which all providers need to use in order to update and maintain their course information. Course Manager is a tool designed for learning providers to expand and increase their marketing reach. It enables providers to add, update and archive courses online quickly and easily, and at a time that suits. Whenever information is updated in Course Manager, it is loaded into the National Learning Directory. By ensuring that this information is as complete as possible, through their Skills Account learners will be able to accurately search for relevant courses offered by all providers, and not just those strategic partners involved in the trials.

More information is available from:
http://www.advice-resources.co.uk/learningproviders/newproviders/cmhelp.pdf/

“Advice resources” is also the location where providers should get information on what they should do to get their data uploaded onto the NLD: http://www.advice-resources.co.uk

8. SKILLS ACCOUNTS TRAINING – SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS
(back to table of contents)

Skills Accounts Training seminars and workshops are being managed in-line with the Regional Implementation and roll-out plans. The LSC Regional Project Managers will be contacting local stakeholders as Skills Accounts are rolled out in the relevant areas. If you would like more information regarding this, you should contact your local regional office in the first instance.
9. SUPPORTING MATERIALS & HELPLINE

Supporting materials for Skills Accounts is now available. You can download the Skills Accounts A5 learner leaflet, A3 posters, as well as PowerPoint presentations and templates from the LSC campaign resource website:

www.lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources

Briefings and training sessions together with supporting materials are designed to give strategic partners the information needed to confidently talk to learners about Skills Accounts, the benefits of having a Skills Account and why their participation in the trials is so important.

Helpline

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

10. MORE INFORMATION

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