The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will today launch a new and unique scheme that enables people to buy Gift Vouchers towards the cost of Further Education (FE) courses for the first time.

The pilot project, launching today in nine colleges across England, will promote FE courses as ‘the Perfect Gift’ for people to give to friends and family, to help loved ones learn brand new skills. The trial comes as new research reveals that over half (56%) of people would like to receive a Gift Voucher for a training course as a present.

The ICM research, commissioned by DIUS, also showed that receiving a Voucher for a course was the third most popular gift people would like to receive (20%) after clothes (31%) and books (25%), but ahead of music (15%) and toiletries (7%) in a list of five possible gifts.

Launching the pilot today at the College of North East London (CoNEL), David Lammy, Minister for Skills, said: “The Perfect Gift pilot is a superb example of the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit that runs through the FE sector. Enabling people to purchase Vouchers for courses is a simple but effective way to make learning, and the benefits of learning, even more accessible to everyone.”

The Gift Vouchers can be used to enrol on a variety of courses available at participating colleges and are redeemable during the 2007-2008 academic year. Each Gift Voucher has a value of £50 and may cover the full course cost or a contribution towards it.
In addition to CoNEL, DIUS and the LSC are working with Chichester College, New College Nottingham, Blackpool & Fylde College, Gateshead College, York College, West Hertfordshire College, Filton College (Bristol) and Warwickshire College.

Paul Head, Principal of CoNEL said of the scheme: “This is the ideal gift for a friend or family member whom you know is keen to develop a hobby, learn a new skill or even update existing skills. We’re excited about the opportunity this innovative project presents, and are certain it will appeal to a wide range of people.”

Linda Siegle, Joint Chief Executive of the Campaign for Learning, commented: “This is an excellent initiative which supports our own objectives of encouraging family members to help loved ones in developing their skills through engaging in learning. What better time to offer the chance to buy a learning course as a gift, than just after National Family Learning Week, when families have had the opportunity to get a taste of the enjoyment and benefit of learning at events across the country. We believe this straightforward yet effective idea will prove extremely popular and we look forward to hearing how the initiative develops.”

Other findings from the research revealed a little more about people’s spending habits when it comes to gifts:

- People in the North East and North of England would most like to receive a training course as a gift (25%)
- 25 to 54 year olds would most like to receive a course as a gift (24% average)
- The average amount people usually spend on gifts for close family members is £75

The Perfect Gift pilot has been developed as part of the LSC’s Skills Campaign. ‘Our future. It’s in our hands’, was developed and launched by the LSC in July on behalf of Government and partners across further education. The campaign is one of the most significant attempts by Government to improve the attitudes and aspirations of employers.
and individuals to learning and training, at all levels. It is designed to inspire the nation to take control of their future through learning.

There has never been a better, or easier time for young people, adults and employers to access learning and qualifications to improve their earning and business potential. Individuals keen to take control of their lives through learning should call 0800 011 30 30 or visit the campaign website; www.lsc.gov.uk/inourhands

The Minister concluded: “This is an original method of attracting more people into learning and I hope that following the trial, other colleges will be encouraged to follow suit. There is no doubt that learning gives people improved career prospects, employability and a better quality of life, and initiatives which raise awareness of this should be fully supported.”

Ends

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Notes to editors:


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.
College of North East London

Key facts:
- 92% achievement rate, which puts them in the top 10% of colleges in the country
- They enrol over 13,000 learners each year (11,000 adults and 2,000 under 19 year olds)
- They offer a wide range of courses (over 500 qualifications) from Entry Level to Level 4
- Retention rates for 2005/2006 was 91%

Most popular short courses:
- NCFE Music Technology
- NVQ Barbering Level 2
- CYQ Fitness Instructor
- Introduction to Childcare Practice
- ITQ (ECDL) IT user qualification
- City and Guilds IT Software Development
- City and Guilds PC Maintenance
- Introduction to Counselling

Gift Voucher:
Purchase terms and conditions
- People can purchase a voucher by visiting or calling participating colleges
- The voucher can be paid for using debit, credit cards or cheques
- When the voucher is purchased over the phone it will be sent via a secured postal service
- Upon delivery, the recipient must give immediate written notice of any damage, defect or shortage.
- The recipient may not reproduce in any form the voucher, and/or the trade marks or anything deceptively similar to it, or authorise assist or enable others to do so.
- The voucher cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer or coupon and is not refundable.
- Redemption Terms are detailed on the voucher.

Redemption terms and conditions
- The voucher may be used to pay for the full cost of a course or a contribution towards it at the following course providers: The College of North East London, Chichester College, New College Nottingham, Blackpool & Fylde College, Gateshead College, York College, West Hertfordshire College, Filton College (Bristol) and Warwickshire College.
- The voucher can be redeemed by visiting the participating course providers.
- The voucher cannot be redeemed online.
- The voucher can only be used towards courses stipulated by each participating course provider.
- The voucher can only be redeemed once and by one individual.
- No cash alternative is available.
- Photocopies will not be accepted.
- You must not reproduce in any form the voucher, and/or the trade marks or anything deceptively similar to it, or authorise assist or enable others to do so.
- The voucher cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer or coupon and is not transferable.
- The voucher is not replaceable if lost, stolen, destroyed or expired.
• Enrolment on a selected course is subject to availability and places cannot be guaranteed.
• The voucher can be redeemed between October 17th 2007 and the end of the academic year (June) 2008.
• The voucher will be retained.
• The voucher is not refundable.