Welcome to the third 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 information and careers advice about how to improve their skills and access financial support.

Trials of Skills Accounts begin on the 29 September and will continue until national rollout in 2010/11. The objective of the trials is to test the service and systems prior to a wider roll-out in 2009/10. 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.

The aim of this monthly e-bulletin is to provide all our partners with the latest information on Skills Accounts and to keep them updated during the trials. You will receive the latest edition of this e-bulletin on the last Friday of each month.

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

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1. SKILLS ACCOUNTS – THE BACKGROUND

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.”

2. 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;
c. a secure record of their achievements, that can, with their permission, be shared so that they can review their skills and choose the courses and the qualifications they need to progress.

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 voucher as ‘payment’ towards a course of their choice at an accredited learning provider. Taking into account the lessons learnt through the Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) trials, 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.

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. Therefore, from September individuals may be offered a Skills Account when they enrol on a course with one of 20 strategic partners in the two trial regions. When the online Skills Account portal goes live in November, individuals will also be able to open an account themselves; through their local nextstep provider; or through the national Careers Advice Service. Additionally from December, 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.

In addition, 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.

### 3. SKILLS ACCOUNTS TRIALS

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

Trials will be 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 starts in September and is being trialled in the East Midlands and South East. The Skills Accounts trials for Jobcentre Plus clients only will also commence later on in the year. All of the trials will be ongoing up until the national roll-out in 2010/11.

The West Midlands is the first region to start the IES trials. They will begin trialling the newly developed Skills Health Check on 29 September with Jobcentre Plus customers who will access it through the nextstep service. It should be noted that the Skills Accounts offer in these trials will not go live until December. Further areas involved within the IES Trials will begin to offer Skills Accounts as the Trials progress.

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 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 1000 Skills Account holders will commence in December 2008, with a second wave of questioning occurring a year later.
4. PROVIDERS – BENEFITING FROM SKILLS ACCOUNTS
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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 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 ‘voucher’. These learners will already have opened a Skills Account and should therefore be taken through normal enrolment processes. Learners that go to a provider off their own back will still need to be flagged as having a Skills Account in order for the LSC to evaluate the service.

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

5. SKILLS ACCOUNTS TRAINING – SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS
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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.
6. COLLATERAL & HELPLINE

Collateral for Skills Accounts is now available. You can download the Skills Accounts A5 learner leaflet, A3 posters, copies of the fulfilment letters as well as PowerPoint presentations and letterhead templates from the LSC campaign resource website:

www.lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources

Briefings and training sessions together with this collateral 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.

The website for Skills Accounts, through which learners will be able to access and manage their account, is currently under development and is scheduled to go live in November 2008. Learners will also be able to open and manage their Skills Account from November through Careers Advice Services.

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. Throughout the summer months Regional LSC Skills Accounts teams will be holding a series of workshops and seminars to inform and train stakeholders about the trials.

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

Please look out for the next edition on 31 October.