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

Skills Accounts will help individuals take control of their learning and working life. Skills Accounts provide 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 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.

The aim of this e-bulletin is to provide 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

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1. SKILLS ACCOUNTS - THE STORY SO FAR...

Since Skills Accounts launched in September 2008 the twenty strategic learning providers in the two trial regions have been actively promoting their benefits to new and current adult learners, helping them take control of their learning and working life. Many of the strategic learning providers have registered a significant number of learners along with a high number of learners that have been registered through the Careers Advice Service and nextstep since they joined the trials in December.

Feedback from the trial regions has been positive. Nigel Duncan (Vice-Principal, Fareham College), a strategic learning provider in the South East region, believes "Skills Accounts have provided our adult learners with a significant resource, through which they have accessed a wealth of information, advice and guidance that otherwise they may not have been aware of. As a major provider of courses in South East Hampshire, we are looking forward to using the market information collected by the Skills Accounts to develop and target our provision effectively."

At City College Brighton and Hove, Kelvin (a careers adviser) has been impressed by the enthusiasm that Skills Accounts have been welcomed with by learners: "On the whole, the new Skills Accounts have been welcomed by those students we encounter at our front desk. The vast majority of learners told about the initiative have responded by expressing their intention to sign up, some quite enthusiastically."

The same experience is replicated in the East Midlands. Linda Burman, Student Support Manager for Leicester College, thinks that “The main benefit of a Skills Account is that learners’ experiences, skills and transferable attributes are stored in a single online space, providing an easily accessible and powerful record of accomplishment. We often find that learners do not recognise the value of recording their personal accomplishments, so they may leave out important experiences that could have a positive impact on future job applications.”

Nextstep Network Manager in the East Midlands, Sarah Bull says “Although it is early days in the trial, our clients are seeing the value of a Skills Account and how it can help them improve their career progression through learning.”

This anecdotal feedback is really encouraging as we continue to develop a service that is empowering, informative and useful for individuals. The momentum in the trials is really gaining pace but we need to continue to ensure that Skills Accounts are promoted at every opportunity on the learner’s journey. To help you do so, marketing materials are available on the Campaign Resources Site (lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources) and we encourage you to make full use of them.

2. EVALUATING THE TRIALS

The purpose of the Skills Accounts 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 from autumn 2009. Therefore thorough evaluation is essential which is why an independent team of consultants are currently undertaking initial interviews and organising meetings with colleagues working at both the Careers Advice Service and strategic learning providers. In addition, they have organised meetings with colleagues from both the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the various LSC offices to help document the lessons learned from the implementation of Skills Accounts.
As part of the evaluation of this year’s trials, a longitudinal study of learner attitudes to Skills Accounts is scheduled to begin in late spring 2009. Skills Accounts holders will be contacted throughout the evaluation process, with the second phase due to start the following winter. The findings of both this quantitative study and the initial qualitative study will be used to inform future developments and expansion of Skills Accounts.

As highlighted in the last e-bulletin, the Skills Accounts website now has a new feedback page where individuals can provide their comments, thoughts and future ideas on how we can improve the Skills Account Service as we expand over the coming years. The feedback form can be found at: http://skillsaccounts.direct.gov.uk/Feedback.aspx

All stakeholders are encouraged to provide feedback to their regional Skills Accounts project teams whose contact details are in section 6 of this e-bulletin.

3. ADULT ADVANCEMENT AND CAREERS SERVICE – IDEAS FOREST
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Development and testing new approaches for the adult advancement and careers service continues, including through the advancement network prototypes, leading to roll-out of the new integrated service from August 2010. It is important for us to keep in touch with our partners, stakeholders and careers advisers to draw on ideas, take in opinions on proposals and generate lively discussion as we develop policies. To enable this we have developed the aacs ideas forest, an informal, online tool for people to add their comments and ideas and to take part in discussions.

We have recently "planted" some new trees in the forest, covering important issues for the aacs such as quality standards, advancement networks and partnership working, universal access, Skills Accounts, and workforce development. The ideas forest will be open for at least the next three months. If you want to take part, please visit http://ideas.iagreview.org.uk

4. THE NLD – A CRUCIAL RESOURCE
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The NLD is crucial to the success of the Skills Accounts trials. Therefore all learning providers in the trial regions are encouraged 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 previous 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 promotional leaflet for learners, an A5 leaflet, 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.

Please look out for the next edition of the Skills Accounts e-bulletin on 27 March 2009.