

**SKILLS
ACCOUNTS**



SKILLS ACCOUNTS E-BULLETIN AUGUST 2008

29 August 2008

Our
future.
It's in
our hands.



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

Skills Accounts will help individuals take control of their learning and working life. They are designed to be a gateway through which individuals can access careers information and advice, information about courses in their area, and their eligibility for public funding, with more services becoming available as the system develops.

Trials of Skills Accounts will start in September 2008 and will continue until national rollout in 2010/11. The objective of the trials is to test the service and systems prior to national rollout to ensure that what is being offered through a Skills Account is in line with learners' needs and expectations.

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

The first edition of this e-bulletin was distributed in July to a small group of stakeholders. This edition is being shared with a wider group and consequently much of the same information is being shared again, so apologies if this is a little repetitive for some of you. Nevertheless given the summer holidays it might be worth refreshing yourself with the information!

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 second edition of this e-bulletin:

- 1. Skills Account – the background**
- 2. Skills Accounts – what are they?**
- 3. Skills Accounts Trials**
- 4. Skills Accounts – the role of providers**
- 5. Collateral & helpline**
- 6. More information**



1. 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 are 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*" 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. In addition, "*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?

[\(back to table of contents\)](#)

Skills Accounts will help individuals take control of their learning and working life. They are designed to be a gateway through which individuals can access careers information and advice, information about courses in their area, and their eligibility for public funding, with more services becoming available as the system develops.

Skills Accounts will enable careers advisers (currently delivered through nextstep and learndirect) 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.

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:

1. The careers advice services, which provides information, advice and guidance so that learners can understand their options when deciding about their skills and careers.
2. A voucher which may indicate their eligibility for public funding and show the value of their chosen course.
3. A secure record of their learning, that can, with the learner's 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 Skills Voucher will be generated that may detail the approximate funding available, if they are eligible. They can then use this voucher to 'pay' for a course of their choice at an accredited learning provider. Taking into account the lessons learnt through



Individual Learning Accounts (ILA), funding will still flow from the LSC to providers with payment mechanisms based on standard LSC processes. As a result, only providers approved by the LSC will access funding and this funding will never leave the secure systems used to pay providers. Skills Accounts provision will only be delivered through accredited providers that meet strong LSC quality assurance tests, whilst eligibility for support is in line with existing policies and entitlements.

Each Skills Accounts holder will have a Unique Learner Number (ULN), which will follow them throughout their progression, enabling learners to build a verified record of their learning for the future.

How can Skills Accounts be accessed?

In the long-term, Skills Accounts will be accessible via a number of different access points. During the trial phase we are seeking to substantially test access points and as such there will be 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 the strategic providers. When the online Skills Account portal goes live in November, individuals will also be able to open an Account themselves; via other providers; through their local advice & guidance provider (through nextstep or learndirect); or through Jobcentre Plus advisers, in relevant 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 in some of the Skills Account trial regions. Further details of this will be available shortly.

3. SKILLS ACCOUNTS TRIALS

[\(back to table of contents\)](#)

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 2008 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 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.

Further information on how stakeholders' feedback will be gathered and evaluated will follow soon.



4. SKILLS ACCOUNTS – THE ROLE OF PROVIDERS

[\(back to table of contents\)](#)

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 colleges 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 learner voucher.

During the first year of the trial all FE colleges 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 college off their own back will still need to be flagged as having a Skills Account in order for the LSC to evaluate the service. Further details concerning how this process will operate are currently being developed in conjunction with providers.

The NLD – a crucial resource

The National Learning Directory will be used to provide information for learners through their Skills Account, so it is vital that all providers in the trial areas ensure that their course information is accurate and actively maintained on the National Learning Directory, through Course Manager. Providers upload 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 up to date 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. COLLATERAL & HELPLINE

[\(back to table of contents\)](#)

From the beginning of the autumn, stakeholders will receive Skills Accounts collateral which will include further information about the trials, presentation templates, leaflets, briefing packs, etc. These should give you the information that you need to confidently talk to learners about Skills Accounts, the benefits of having a Skills Accounts and why their participation in the trials is so important.

As mentioned previously, an online platform 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.

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.

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.

6. MORE INFORMATION

[\(back to table of contents\)](#)

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 second 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 26 September.

