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Adult Learners' Week 2008
17 May

**Adult Learning Grant helps Leicester mum design her dream
career in fashion**

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As Adult Learners' Week kicks off on 17 May the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will be celebrating the Adult Learning Grant (ALG), a grant designed to help adults overcome financial barriers to learning.

Introduced in June 2007 the ALG is a weekly grant designed to help adults studying full time with the costs of learning. The grant pays up to £30 per week for full time learners aged 19 and over who are studying for certain qualifications.

Since the national roll out over 20,000 have received ALG, over 1,600 in the East Midlands.

Like Shaheen Popat, 32, of Thurmaston in Leicester. For most mothers of three a career in fashion would seem like an unattainable dream, but for Shaheen the dream is coming true.

Keen on fashion from a young age, Shaheen used to unpick her clothes so she could see how they were made up, but she finished school at 16, was married at

18 and had three children, Aadil 12, Adam 13 and Mariambibi 6, but she was always keen to return to college and to get a career in fashion.

With the children a bit older, and with help from ALG, she's now preparing her final pieces for a fashion show to mark the end of a BTEC in Contemporary Cultural Fashion at Leicester College. Next year she'll be studying the foundation degree at Leicester College, which she hopes will lead to a teaching job in pattern cutting.

Shaheen said:

“Going back to college has been great. My husband, Feroz, has been really pleased I've stuck it out. I'd tried other courses before but always gave them up, basically because the boys were young and I had so many other commitments, visiting both sets of parents and helping them out with chores like shopping. Plus there was the money side of things.

“When I decided to start this BTEC I knew I needed some financial support so I spoke to the welfare department at Leicester College and asked if there was any additional help available. They told me about the ALG and it's been invaluable. I've been able to use the money for fabrics, sketchbooks and travel costs. I've also been putting some of the money aside towards my end project – a fashion show featuring three of my designs of contemporary, traditional wedding dresses.

“The kids love what I'm doing – they love seeing all the bits and pieces and my daughter now wants to be a designer.

“As well as my daughter I've also inspired my older sister. She was in the same boat as me but she found the idea of study a lot more daunting. After she saw how much I enjoyed it she started a 12 week IT course and she loves it.

“You have to go for it and do what you want to do because life’s too short. And there’s so much out there now that can help you – lots of the courses fit around the children and getting money through the ALG is really helpful.

“But the most important help has been from my family and the tutors at Leicester College, I couldn’t have done it without all their support.”

Mary Rogers, Area Director for the Learning and Skills Council in Leicestershire, said:

“The Adult Learning Grant is a real incentive for people across Leicestershire to learn and embrace new skills to improve their job prospects. It’s fair to say that many people recognise the importance of continuing to learn but feel restricted by money. Up to £30 a week can really make the difference when it comes to buying course materials or even putting it towards childcare.

“Adult Learners’ Week is the perfect opportunity for everyone to think seriously about investing in their future and explore the financial grants available to them. Learning is one of the smartest investments to increase your worth and could result in a £2,000 to £3,000 increase in annual salary.

“Going back to learning allows people to gain the qualifications they need to pursue a job with greater job satisfaction and improve their sense of self worth, making the extra cash a bonus.

“To find out if you’re eligible for the grant visit www.direct.gov.uk/alg or telephone 0800 100 900.”

Developed as part of a new Government initiative to improve the levels of both vocational and academic skills in the UK, ALG is intended to be a helping hand for adults who want to learn more skills, but have certain financial worries.

Leicester College Principal Maggie Galliers said:

“We are dedicated to ensuring our students receive all the help possible to pursue their studies. The Adult Learning Grant has certainly been really useful to our students and we’re pleased that students like Shaheen are getting the help they need to pursue their dreams through the grant.

“It’s a great incentive for people to learn new skills as £30 can go a long way. We would certainly encourage students or those thinking about studying to see if they are eligible.”

If you are thinking about going back to college this year it’s time to start looking at your options. ALG could help you – to find out if you are eligible visit www.direct.gov.uk/alg or call 0800 100 900 today.

Notes to editors

1. Adult Learners’ Week 2008 begins on 17 May. The annual week long national campaign is celebrated in over 40 countries and is designed to inspire people to pursue adult learning.

2. The Adult Learning Grant (ALG), a new service from the Learning and Skills Council, is a weekly grant designed to help adults studying full-time with the costs of learning. The grant pays up to £30* per week (around £1,000 a year) for full time learners aged 19 and over who are studying for a first full Level 2 (5 GCSEs at grades A* to C or an NVQ2 or its equivalent) or a first full Level 3 (2 A levels or an NVQ3 or its equivalent) qualification.

3. The Adult Learning Grant is important because skills shortages continue to have a negative impact on UK productivity and competitiveness in the face of fast-growing economies. ALG aims to encourage individuals return to education by offering a helping hand to contribute to things like books, travel and learning materials while they study.

4. For more information, go to www.direct.gov.uk/alg

5. The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive 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.

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