

NORTH WEST PEOPLE KEEN TO LEARN A NEW SKILL IN 2008 – WITH HELP FROM AN ADULT LEARNING GRANT

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(with photographs of Paul Bebbington gardening at his local college)

People in the North West are amongst the most keen in the whole of the country to learn a new skill in 2008, a new study commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has revealed.

With January a key time to start thinking about the future and planning ahead, the LSC is offering a £30 a week grant to many adult learners to help with the extra costs that learning can bring.

The Learning and Skills Council has invested £35m in the national roll-out of the Adult Learning Grant (ALG). The weekly grant is 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. In a recent survey conducted by ICM Omnibus of 18 to 65-year-olds, the North West was found to have a high number of people who want to learn a new skill for 2008.

One student to benefit is an electronics salesman from Cheshire who is planning to swap his job in a trade warehouse for a career in the Great Outdoors, thanks to financial help from an Adult Learning Grant (ALG).

Paul Bebbington, a 36 year-old father of three from Alsager, is pursuing his dream career in countryside management by becoming a full time student at Reaseheath College in Nantwich, Cheshire. Understandably, he is on a tight budget and is using the £30 a week ALG to meet his travel expenses.

Paul, who progressed this year from the introductory National Certificate in Environmental Conservation to the Advanced National Certificate in Countryside Management, said: "The grant has definitely influenced me to take my studies further. Having a regular sum coming in has taken the pressure off. We did have a bit of a struggle last year, financially, and I applied as soon as the grant was introduced this year."

Paul left school at 16 and spent 15 years working for an electrical wholesaler before deciding to return into education. Concerns about environmental issues, particularly the effects of pollution, prompted him to apply for a countryside course. He has been adding to his new practical and academic skills by working on local environmental projects with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) in his spare time.

He says: "I've never regretted becoming a mature student. I'm really looking forward to a new career in the countryside, doing things which will hopefully make a difference for the next generation."

Janet Jackson, Partnership Director for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in the North West, said: "A wide range of courses can be supported by the Adult Learning Grant (ALG) across the North West at a range of colleges. You can use it to help with everything from the cost of books through to childcare costs.

“Paul’s story shows how the ALG can help students with their finances while they pursue their academic dreams”.

Self-esteem expert and psychologist, Dr Gary Wood encourages adults to go out and pursue their dreams this New Year, claiming that the benefits of learning a new skill can give a far reaching boost to all aspects of a person’s wellbeing, whatever their age.

He comments: “It really never is too late to learn and it’s true that learning a new skill and getting a new job can help boost your self confidence. It may also serve as an inspiration and motivation to invigorate other aspects in your life. So you may also find yourself tackling other personal goals too such as getting fitter and healthier”.

Intended to be a helping hand for adults who want to learn more skills but have financial constraints, the ALG has been developed as part of a drive to improve the levels of vocational and academic skills in the UK.

If you are thinking about going back to college in September now is a better time than any to start looking for a course to suit you. Call 0800 100 900 or visit www.direct.gov.uk/alg to find out if you are eligible.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Dr Gary Wood and Paul Bebbington are available for interviews as well as a number of case studies from around the country, please contact Anne Arnold on 0161 952 4505 or e-mail anne.arnold@gnn.gsi.gov.uk for media enquiries.

Dr Gary Wood is author of 'Don't Wait For Your Ship To Come In. Swim Out To Meet It', published by Capstone, March 2008.

ALG is available to learners aged over 19 who are studying full time for a first full level 2 (5 GCSE's 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.

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