



Communications briefing for Skills Accounts 09/10 trials

October 2009

Purpose

This pack has been prepared for use by LSC, BIS, strategic partners, providers and those involved in the Skills Accounts trials. It provides the latest communications material, including key messages and information. This document will next be updated in December 2009. We welcome your input and contributions.

For updates, questions and input please contact:

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KEY HEADLINE INFORMATION

A Skills Account is a personalised online service that allows individuals to take control of their learning and working life. This provides access to a range of information and advice on skills, careers and financial support in a single, easily accessible location.

For those who are thinking about learning a new skill, or a change in their career, a Skills Account is the place to start. A Skills Account will help an individual to:

- Identify the skills they have
- Match their skills to possible job roles
- Choose the right course
- Find out if they can get funding to support them
- Track how much money the individual and the Government have invested in their recent learning
- Create an action plan based on their skills and achievements and access services to help them make the next step.

Skills Accounts will be an integral part of the Advancement Service. Skills Accounts play an important role in supporting both learners and those seeking employment. In 2009/10, Skills Accounts will be rolled out throughout England. The trial will continue the universal Skills Accounts offer for any individual who may wish to access FE learning at LSC accredited providers. Lists of learning providers involved with the trial are available through the course search tool in the Skills Account system.

For individuals seeking work it is also important that a Skills Account supports their journey to sustainable employment. We are therefore, also trialling Skills Accounts for Jobcentre Plus customers in a number of locations in the coming year. Currently, these areas are: the West Midlands and the Hampshire/Isle of Wight sub region of the South East. For Jobcentre Plus customers, a Skills Account will be one of a range of new services being developed to provide support to help them gain sustainable employment. Skills Accounts are being tested within the wider context of an Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) service; hence the reason why they are being included within these specific trials. Employability Skills Programme (ESP) Providers and **nextstep** advisers will be helping customers to open Skills Accounts, as part of their integrated package of support, to help them get back to work.

In developing Skills Accounts, we have been careful to learn the lessons that led to the closure of the Individual Learner Accounts (ILA) programme. For Skills Accounts, the contracting and payment mechanisms will be based on mainstream LSC processes through the Adult Learner Responsive (ALR) funding model. Therefore no actual money will transfer "outside the system".

Skills Accounts provision will only be delivered through providers approved to receive LSC funding and who continue to comply with the LSC's rigorous quality assurance arrangements.

SKILLS ACCOUNTS

THE SKILLS ACCOUNT CONCEPT

1. What is a Skills Account?

A Skills Account will give individuals access to a new range of integrated services which will help them take control of their learning and working life. Through a Skills Account, individuals will receive greater choice and support, enabling them to make their own decisions regarding their future. They are designed to provide a gateway through which individuals can access personalised careers advice including details of courses in their area, and assess their eligibility for government funding to contribute towards the costs of their learning.

By highlighting the actual value of their chosen course, the aim is to encourage more learners to invest in their own skills. The introduction of Skills Accounts has not altered any of the existing eligibility criteria or entitlements. A Skills Account also includes a confidential record of an individual's achievements so that they can share these with employers, careers information and advice services or others who may find it helpful. For those individuals who make use of the **nextstep** service, a skills action plan will be produced which provides a personalised plan of the individual's key areas for development. Individuals may also access the skills diagnostic tool on the Skills Accounts website to create their own action plan to record their key areas for development. It is also possible to review and update an action plan as more skills are gained.

BACKGROUND

2. What is the history of Skills Accounts?

Lord Leitch in his 2006 report "Prosperity for all in a global economy: World Class Skills" first recommended that public funding for skills should be routed through a learner account. The Government accepted this recommendation and in "World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England" outlined their intention to introduce Skills Accounts in 2008/09.

The Government then set out its long term vision for Skills Accounts in its June 2008 "Work Skills" paper, stating that *"from the age of 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 the age of 18 receive an Apprenticeship Credit towards the costs."*

3. Was there not a trial of Adult Learner Accounts (ALAs) in 2007?

Yes. A small-scale trial of ALAs aimed at Level 3 learners started in the South East and East Midlands in 2007. The target was for 4,000 people to open an ALA in the first year and we comfortably exceeded that target and have ensured that all lessons learned from the ALA trials have been incorporated into the development of Skills Accounts.

Evaluation of ALAs found that:

- One-third of ALA learners chose their course to help them get a new or better job or gain promotion
- A further third chose their course to help them move on in education
- Learners really do value the choice and the support offered

- Learners also welcome advice on progression opportunities and over half of those surveyed reported that they had accessed further careers advice since opening their ALA

The ALA trial will continue until all individuals involved have completed their learning.

TRIALS

4. Who is responsible for policy, delivery and implementation of the trial?

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is leading on policy relating to the trials and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are leading on delivery within the trial regions. The implementation of the IES trials is also the responsibility of the LSC in conjunction with the policy leads within BIS and the DWP.

5. What is the purpose of the Skills Accounts trial?

The purpose of the Skills Accounts trial is to meet the Government's long term vision for Skills Accounts by 2015 as described in Leitch World Class Skills. The objective of the second year of the trial is to carefully expand the Skills Accounts service to all regions of England, introducing new audiences in a phased roll out.

6. How is Skills Accounts being rolled out?

The Skills Accounts trials began implementing and testing the systems in September 2008 in the South East and East Midlands. The wider Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials also began in September in the West Midlands, although the Skills Accounts offer was not included until March 2009. Through the IES trials, JCP customers are offered a Skills Account when they contact either the **nextstep** service or enrol upon an Employability Skills Programme (ESP). In August 2009, the South West and Yorkshire and the Humber regions implemented Skills Accounts, while both the South East and East Midlands began to significantly increase the number of providers offering Skills Accounts. In November 2009, the West Midlands, and North West will begin offering the universal Skills Accounts service.

7. How will we learn from the Skills Accounts trial?

We are very mindful of the complexities associated with introducing a new service which must be integrated with a range of delivery partners. That is why we emphasise that the purpose of this trial is to test how this new service can be best delivered to individuals and to identify any potential problems or shortcomings in the service before it is rolled out on a larger scale. As such, we see this as an evolutionary process which may change as we learn what works best for individuals. We will closely manage the experience of individuals on a day-to-day basis to ensure they receive a high quality service. We have also commissioned an independent evaluation of its performance.

8. Is the name Skills Accounts here to stay?

Skills Accounts will be used for the duration of the trials. The branding, including the name, will be phased out towards the end of 2009/10 as the Advancement Service launches to the public in August 2010.

9. How many individuals are expected to take part in the trial period?

We have modelled expected volumes of individuals to open a Skills Account. The first year of the trials has generated over 20,000 applications for Skills Accounts. It is anticipated that the numbers will increase significantly during the second year of the trials. The purpose of the trial is to create a quality system for the individual and to ensure that they enjoy a positive Skills Account experience.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SKILLS ACCOUNTS

10. How will individuals access Skills Accounts?

A Skills Account can be opened in a number of ways:

1. Online through www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts
2. The **nextstep** service can open a Skills Account for an individual and provide additional support
3. ESP Providers in IES trial areas can open a Skills Account on behalf of an individual
4. The national telephone helpline (0800 100 900) operated by the Careers Advice Service can register an individual's interest in a Skills Account
5. Within the trial regions, as part of the trials, some colleges and training providers will be offering Skills Accounts to targeted groups of learners.

For those individuals who do not have access to the internet, they will be able to open a Skills Account at a **nextstep** office or via the Careers Advice Service.

Strategic Learning Providers will inform learners during the enrolment process, and will register individuals for a Skills Account using a 'batch process' as part of the trial.

11. How do you ensure the product will be easy to understand?

Skills Accounts have been designed to make it easier for individuals to access information. Testing and evaluation of the policy, product and systems will continue to take place throughout the trials' development and expansion. Different groups of stakeholders and learners have been, and will continue to be consulted during the testing, trialling and evaluation processes. We have taken on board the feedback of learners and, as a result, have improved the website look and feel which has resulted in the development of a new website. Clear evaluation of the systems and policies will continue as the trials roll out to enable changes to be made to policy and systems as and when required.

FUNDING

12. Will Skills Accounts take away funding from Train to Gain?

Skills Accounts work within current funding policy and will not affect Train to Gain's funding. It should be clearly understood that a Skills Account is not a funding stream.

13. How much funding for learning are learners eligible for?

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. For those not already qualified at this level, these entitlements could typically be worth £7,000. This is the average amount an individual without any qualifications could be entitled to in order to enable them to gain basic skills, first full Level 2 and first full Level 3. But the actual amount would vary depending on the individual's chosen course.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

14. How will Skills Accounts be marketed in the trial regions?

We have developed a range of marketing materials which will enable partners to effectively promote Skills Accounts such as leaflets, posters, banners and advert templates. As individuals participating in the IES trials are already in contact with the system, we do not envisage a need to promote Skills Accounts more widely at this stage. Regional LSC Marketing and Communications teams will be responsible for ensuring partners have the marketing materials at their disposal.

15. What communications materials are available?

There are numerous communications materials available for partners and Stakeholders on the LSC's Campaign Resources Site www.lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources

Marketing materials such as posters and leaflets are available to order directly from Granby by emailing lsc@granbymarketing.com quoting the publication number below, quantity required and delivery address. In order to monitor supplies, providers should also inform their Regional LSC contacts when ordering.

Publication Numbers:

A3 Poster LSC-I-NAT-090156
*NEW*A5 Leaflet LSC-P-NAT 090170

Banner stands can also be ordered to support the promotion of Skills Accounts. To order a banner stand, please email fatiha.laauch@lsc.gov.uk quoting SA banner stand, the quantity required and delivery address.

Stakeholders can also receive a monthly Skills Accounts e-bulletin to ensure that they are up to date on the trial's progress. If you would like to receive the E-bulletin, please email fatiha.laauch@lsc.gov.uk to be included upon the Skills Accounts mailing list.

16. When will you start communicating Skills Accounts to the press?

At present, there aren't any plans to conduct pro-active press activity. All reactive press enquiries regarding Skills Accounts should be directed to the LSC Press Office on 02476 823 515.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

17. Is there a helpline for stakeholders?

Stakeholders can contact the email and telephone helpline for information about communications around Skills Accounts on skillscampaign@lsc.gov.uk or 020 7413 3400.

18. Will there be a helpline for regional partners?

Regional partners and stakeholders should contact their regional LSC Skills Accounts Team for advice/queries. Please contact your local LSC Regional Office for details.

A customer technical support line (0800 100 900) is available to provide the first level of support, for example; if a user experiences any technical issues or error messages whilst visiting the site.

19. What training on the Skills Accounts services/products has been available for Stakeholder staff?

Throughout 2009/10, a planned programme of training and briefings will be implemented to inform stakeholders about the trials. Training has been conducted and support is available to assist **nextstep** advisers locally and the Careers Advice Service nationally, as well as learning providers' frontline staff.

20. Is specific guidance available for providers to operate Skills Accounts?

Specific guidance and FAQs are available for providers when communicating with learners and for raising awareness with staff. This can be found on the LSC website at: www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/skillsaccounts/

PROVIDER INFORMATION

21. The Skills Voucher has been renamed and repositioned – why?

Feedback from users and stakeholders throughout 2008/09, including learning providers, has prompted a review of the way in which the voucher is used. It is clear from early

evaluation that many individuals find the funding information displayed on the voucher useful. However, learners and providers are finding it hard to use the voucher meaningfully when, under current procedures, the voucher doesn't trigger funding to the provider. As a result, the voucher will be phased out in October 2009 and replaced with an indication of the government funding which an individual's chosen course may attract. This can be found under the 'Funding for Learning' section on the Skills Accounts website.

The Skills Accounts offer will remain the same with no changes to either entitlement or any of the courses available. However, it will no longer be necessary for users to print off the voucher to hand in to a provider. Any individual who approaches a learning provider with a voucher should be advised that the voucher is their personal guide to how much money may be available for their learning. However, there is no longer a need to provide the learning provider with a copy of the voucher.

22. What will the additional workload be? Will additional staff be required?

Within the strategic learning partners/**nextstep**, opening a Skills Account should be undertaken as part of the standard registration process/meeting. Therefore delivery partners should not require any additional staff.

23. Will stakeholders and individuals have the opportunity to feedback through a formal process?

Stakeholders' and individuals' input is crucial to the future development of Skills Accounts. They will be asked to share their experiences of the trial so that these can be fed back into the evaluation process.

24. What are the benefits for individuals and stakeholders?

For individuals, careers information and advice is available, including information on learning opportunities and financial support all in one place; offering them an opportunity to find the information they need to take control of their learning and working life.

For delivery partners, they have the opportunity to help mould future policy as well as begin to understand the changes and processes that are taking place within the FE sector. This includes what they need to do to adapt and compete in the demand led funding environment we are moving towards.

25. Where can organisations not involved in the trials find additional information?

Stakeholders can also receive a monthly Skills Accounts e-bulletin to ensure that they are up to date on the trial's progress. If you would like to receive the e-bulletin, please email fatih.laauch@lsc.gov.uk to be included upon the Skills Accounts mailing list.

Alternatively if you have a specific query, please liaise with your regional LSC Skills Accounts contact.

26. Do colleges still have to run the usual eligibility checks on an individual, who has checked their entitlements via their Skills Account?

Yes; having a Skills Account does not remove the requirement for providers to ensure that individuals are eligible for funding. The declarations regarding eligibility on the Skills Account website are made by the individual. The burden of audit evidence is still on the learning provider.

27. How will you ensure that individuals have access to the most accurate information?

The National Learning Directory (NLD) is used to provide information for individuals and so it is vital that all providers in the trial areas ensure that their course information is accurate and actively maintained on the NLD, 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.

"Advice resources" is the location where providers can get information on what they should do to get their data uploaded onto the NLD: www.advice-resources.co.uk

STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS

28. How are stakeholders engaged in the Skills Accounts trials?

The External Stakeholder Reference Group led by BIS is working with key stakeholders in the development and implementation of a coherent, joint offer for Skills Accounts and the Advancement Service. This group will draw upon stakeholders' expertise in the phase of moving from trials through to national roll out.

Additional briefings and presentations involving national and regional LSC staff will continue throughout the implementation of the trials during 2009/10.

29. What is the level of understanding and buy in from the strategic partners/employees?

Briefings to strategic partners will continue during the second year of the trial. Nominated attendees have been asked to cascade information through to colleagues. Ongoing support to all participating providers will be available through LSC staff. A number of sub-groups will involve an array of strategic partner representatives, which will help information to be shared within the strategic partner's organisation.

30. Can private training providers get involved in the Skills Accounts trials?

The current Skills Account trial is focusing on testing and trialling the Skills Accounts systems and evaluating different routes through which Skills Accounts can be offered. There is currently no additional provision or funding available for Skills Accounts outside of the Adult Learner Responsive (ALR) budget and therefore providers who are not offering ALR provision are currently out of scope for these trials.

We are planning on expanding the trial over the next few years and therefore more information will become available as the trial develops. Your regional LSC contact will be able to advise you upon the trials at a future date.

31. What has been the feedback and experience of stakeholders and individuals who have taken part in the ALA trials in the East Midlands and the South East?

Briefings have taken place within these regions with providers that offered Adult Learner Accounts (ALA). Discussions have also taken place with the National Learner Panel to gain a useful insight into their thoughts on the process. Further information on feedback can be found under question 3.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

32. How will Skills Accounts fit in with the wider development of the Advancement Service?

The Advancement Service will be launched during August 2010. In developing Skills Accounts we are working very closely with the Advancement Service policy team to ensure that the two services are aligned and integrated in a way which works best for the individual. For August 2010, we are working to develop one web portal, which will integrate all adult careers and advice services including Skills Accounts, **nextstep** and the Careers Advice Service. This will ensure the customer experiences an integrated, easy to use service, all incorporated under the same brand.

DATA PROTECTION

33. What steps are taken to protect my data?

The Learning and Skills Council and BIS take Data Protection matters extremely seriously. The LSC is registered as a Data Controller with the Information Commissioner for the purposes of handling personal data. Anyone who applies for a Skills Account is provided with an explanation of how their data will be used.

The systems and processes implemented by the LSC for managing personal data are reviewed regularly for security purposes in accordance with government requirements. LSC staff designated to handle personal data receive training in Data Protection requirements. Should you have any questions regarding how we handle personal data, you can make enquiries of the LSC under our Privacy Policy <http://skillsaccounts.direct.gov.uk/Terms.aspx>

34. How will success be measured?

Through investment in Skills Accounts it is anticipated that individuals will gain significant benefits through "a culture change in the nation's attitude to skills, motivating and empowering more adults to take up, invest and progress in learning to support sustainable employment and career progression." Skills Accounts are also intended to impact on the FE system, driving a high quality FE sector that responds to individuals' demands, as well as contributing to the integration of employment and skills.

Measures will be implemented for the second year of the trials, which includes Key Performance Indicators. They will link closely to the evaluation, which will consider whether the systems in place have added value to the individuals' experience.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AS – Advancement Service

ALA – Adult Learner Accounts

CIAS - Careers Information and Advice Services – currently provided by **nextstep** and the Careers Advice Service (CAS)

ESP - Employability Skills Programme

IES – Integrated Employment & Skills

ILA – Individual Learning Accounts

MIAP – Managing Information Across Partners

SLP – Strategic Learning Providers

Universal Trials – offer available to all adults

LSC MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS –CONTACT DETAILS

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