



# **FAQs: Providers of Skills Accounts**

November 2009



These FAQs are intended as a resource for all delivery partners including learning providers, **nextstep**, Employability Skills Programme (ESP) and Careers Advice Service involved in Skills Accounts from November 2009 onwards.

For those existing delivery partners please note that additional services are now available through Skills Accounts. The Website for this current release may also look and feel different. In response to learners and providers, interactive customer journeys are now central to the navigation of the site. (See question 21) There is also freely available information for individuals prior to them logging-in or registering for an account.

## **General**

### **Q1. What is a Skills Account?**

A Skills Account is a personalised online service which provides an individual with:

- direct access online to skills and careers advice
- details about their eligibility for government funding for learning
- ability to assess current skills & interests and develop an individual action plan
- a clear record of future goals, skills and career achievements, providing clear evidence of a commitment to training and progression that can be shared
- information on courses in their area

A Skills Account is a new way for an individual to take control of their learning and working life through the variety of tools available online. In addition, skills and careers advice are available over the telephone or through face-to-face sessions.

Skills Accounts are being trialled on a regional basis, which will expand throughout 2009/10. They will be available throughout England by 2010. As the trial develops more services and functions will be available through the Skills Accounts website.

The purpose of the trial is to test the functions and systems of Skills Accounts and provider processes to support delivery.

### **Q2. Which regions are offering Skills Accounts?**

The Skills Accounts trial began in the South East and East Midlands LSC regions in September 2008 and in the West Midlands in March 2009. During 2009/10 the trials will expand into the other 6 LSC regions as follows:

From October 2009 – to include the South West and Yorkshire and the Humber regions

From November 2009 – to include the North West Region

From January 2010 – to include East of England, North East and London Regions

### **Q3. Who is eligible for a Skills Account?**

Skills Accounts are available to all adults in England aged 19yrs and over. However, in certain trial areas Jobcentre Plus clients aged 18 years and over are also eligible. There is no upper age limit.

### **Q4. Does an individual have to have a Skills Account?**

No; Skills Accounts are currently optional

### **Q5. How can an individual open a Skills Account?**

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

1. Open an account online through [www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts](http://www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts)
2. The **nextstep** service can open a Skills Account for an individual and provide additional support either through the Skills Diagnostic Tool or the Skills Account website
3. ESP Providers in certain Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trial areas can support learners in opening a Skills Account
4. The national telephone helpline (0800 100 900) operated by the Careers Advice Service can register an individual's interest for a Skills Account
5. Within the trial regions, some colleges and training providers will be offering Skills Accounts to targeted groups of learners

### **Q6. What is the future of Skills Accounts?**

Skills Accounts have been successfully trialled over the academic year 2008/09 and some 20,000 applications for Skills Accounts have been processed. This demonstrates a clear demand from learners for a service to empower them to take control of their learning and working lives.

Looking forward, certain aspects of Skills Accounts will be expanding incrementally across England prior to a national roll out as part of the new advancement service in 2010.

During the second year of the trials, Skills Accounts will be tested with new audiences, for example, to different customers such as Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LLDD), and Offenders in Learning and Skills.

## **Funding**

### **Q7. Is eligibility for a Skills Account the same as eligibility for learning/funding?**

No; all adults in England are eligible for a Skills Account.

One of the key objectives of Skills Accounts is to enable individuals to understand and access the Government funding entitlement to a particular chosen learning course. Whilst normal LSC funding eligibility applies, this entitlement will vary, depending on the individuals' age, current level of learning, residency and course interest. The value is

derived from the subject and course information stored in the National Learning Aims Database (LAD).

For the current trials, the Government contributions highlighted through the Skills Account will focus primarily on the Adult Learner Responsive and Learner Support budgets. As the trial expands, other LSC funding routes may also be included.

**Q8. Do colleges still have to run the usual eligibility checks on a learner, who has checked their entitlements via their Skills Account?**

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

**Q9. Will an individual have to pay an additional charge for a course, from that shown by the Skills Account system?**

The price a college or training provider charges will be in addition to the Government contribution highlighted in the Skills Account. The purpose of the Skills Account is to provide an indication of the amount of money the Government may invest in an individual's learning. Skills Accounts are not a funding stream and hold no monetary value.

**Q10. Will this affect an individual's benefits?**

The opening of the Skills Account alone will not affect an individual's benefits. However, receipt of various funding may do so. An individual should check with their Jobcentre Plus advisers as to whether their entitlement to benefit will be affected.

**Q11. What happened to the Skills Account Voucher?**

The purpose of the Skills Account Voucher was to provide an indication of the amount of money the Government could have invested in an individual for a chosen course. The aim was motivational in order to inform the learner of the true cost of courses.

Feedback from learners and providers throughout 2008/09 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.

The Skills Account Voucher is no longer included as part of the Skills Account Offer, however a statement can still be produced highlighting an indication of the Government funding which an individual's chosen course may attract. 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 individuals to print off the statement and present to a provider.

Some vouchers however, may still exist; 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.

There is no longer a requirement for the provider to retain the vouchers.

**Q12. What will a Skills Accounts cost an individual?**

Nothing; it's a free service.

## **Data Protection**

**Q13. Who will access the information held about an individual?**

The personal details an individual provides are used to create a Skills Account. At no time will their personal details be passed to organisations for sales or marketing purposes. From time to time, an account holder may be contacted on behalf of the LSC by email, mail or phone, as part of our efforts to monitor performance, improve quality and plan future provision of training and education.

For more information, please see the [Data Protection Statement](#) on the Skills Account website.

**Q14. What if an individual wants to delete their account?**

The Skills Account holder will need to contact the Skills Account team using the 'Contact us' link on the Skills Account website; stating their full name, date of birth, postcode, email address and Skills Account number if they have it. The Skills Account team will find their details and delete them off the system. This may take a few weeks.

**Q15. What should an individual do if they forget their username or password?**

An individual can reset their password or retrieve their username by following the on screen prompts at the log in screen.

Three known facts are requested when an individual opens/activates their account; their mothers' maiden name, the name of their first school and their place of birth. These facts are used to identify the Skills Account holder when their password and/or username have been forgotten.

If for any reason an individual doesn't know the answer to any of the known facts e.g. their mother's maiden name, then any memorable piece of information can be entered. However it must be stressed that they need to remember these details in order to retrieve their password or username if they have been forgotten.

## Support Available

### **Q16. Who can help me if I am having problems with the website?**

If you are a provider opening an account on behalf of an individual and they are present, contact the Careers Advice Service for technical assistance (8am – 10pm, 7 days a week) on:

- Telephone 0800 100 900
- Typetalk 18001 0800 100 900
- Minicom 08000 568 865

Any other problems should be routed through your regional LSC contact.

### **Q17. Who can I contact for further support or if I have a question regarding Skills Accounts?**

Get in touch with your regional LSC contact or in the case of **nextstep** providers liaise with your Prime Contractor.

### **Q18. Will there be training events for providers?**

Yes; please speak to your regional LSC contact for information.

### **Q19. Is specific guidance available for providers to operate Skills Accounts?**

Specific guidance is available for providers when communicating with learners and for raising awareness with staff. This can be found on the [LSC Website](#).

### **Q20. Is there any infrastructure funding at all to support the delivery of Skills Accounts?**

No further funding is available through Skills Accounts to support delivery. Opening of Skills Accounts should be seen as part of standard registration/ induction processes and therefore should not require additional resources.

### **Q21. Where can I get marketing materials from and further information? e.g. posters and leaflets**

Awareness raising & support material for provider and regional staff are available on the Campaign Resources Site; [lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources](http://lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources). Providers are required to register for the site. Once registered, access the Skills Accounts pages select 'Skills Accounts' on the navigation menu.

Marketing and communication material such as posters and leaflets are available to order directly Granby by emailing [lsc@granbymarketing.com](mailto: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 contact when ordering.

Publication Numbers:

Poster	LSC-I-NAT-090156
Leaflet	LSC-P-NAT 090170

## Skills Accounts Service

### Q22. What will a Skills Account give an individual?

A Skills Account brings together all the information, support and services an individual would need in order to make informed choices about their learning and working life.

Through the Skills Account learner Journey they will be able to access:

- a **Course Finder** for viewing what courses are available in their area so that they can choose the provider, course and time that suits their needs
- a **Skills and Interest Assessment Tool** that helps them to identify the skills they need to manage their career
- a **Qualifications Calculator** that shows their current level of learning to help them plan their next steps
- **Careers Advice Job Profiles** allows individuals to search across a range of information about the types of job they are interested in
- an **Unverified Learning Record** which allows individuals to add previous learning achievements and any courses they are currently undertaking
- a **Verified Learning Record**, verified by a learning provider, which contains details of an individual's past achievements and qualifications to date.
- a **Funding Indicator** that allows individuals to identify an estimated level of funding the Government may have contributed towards the total cost of their learning already undertaken. This will be set against their own contributions (where appropriate)
- a **Learner Statement** which shows the actual funding the Government has put towards their learning
- a **web based Skills Diagnostic Tool** that provides an objective assessment of an individual's strengths, skills and abilities and areas for development in key competencies which underpin success at work. As a result of a diagnostic report an Action Plan can then be produced.
- a **Skills Action Plan** is a personal development plan that is created following completion of the a Skills Health Check and the Skills Diagnostic with a **nextstep** adviser and can be viewed as part of the Skills Account if applicable.

### Q23. What courses can an individual access through a Skills Account?

A Skills Account will allow an individual to access a wide range of courses which may be fully or partially funded by the Government. The Course Search facility will identify which courses are available in their area and online.

#### **Q24. What Course Search tool does Skills Account use?**

The Skills Accounts website uses the National Learning Directory (NLD) for course searches. The NLD is also used by lots of other organisation when they run learning campaigns i.e. BBC / Channel 4 so it is important to update on a regular basis. There is support available through Hotcourses (contracted to manage the database by the LSC). Course Manager is a free service which allows providers to edit and manage their course information online, ensuring that data on the NLD is completely comprehensive and up to date. For further information about the NLD and details of training for course manager, please contact: [coursemanager@learning-directory.co.uk](mailto:coursemanager@learning-directory.co.uk)

#### **Q25. How do I get my courses available upon the Course Search Tool?**

The National Learning Directory (NLD) is crucial to the success of the Skills Accounts trials and is an important tool for learning providers to promote their courses to prospective learners. If this information is not maintained as accurately as possible in the NLD, learners will not be able to find your courses through the Skills Account website. It will also make it more difficult for the Careers Advice Service and **nextstep** advisers to help individuals make informed choices.

#### **Q26. Why can't an individual find the course they want on the search tool?**

A course may not be displayed because:

- the information the Course Search facility uses is provided directly by colleges and training providers so it is reliant on them for the accuracy of the information
- certain courses such as those which are Higher Education related are not funded by the LSC and may not be included within this tool. However the [Careers Advice Service](#) helpline (0800 100 900) or **nextstep** can provide further info.

#### **Q27. What is the Funding Indicator and Learner Statement and what is the difference?**

Behind most course fees which colleges and training providers advertise is a contribution made by the Government. Many people are unaware of the investment that is being made in them. By helping individuals to understand the cost of training and the investment involved, it may help and encourage individuals to think carefully about the commitment and the importance of making an informed decision about their particular needs.

The **Funding Indicator** is designed to show an individual the estimated government contribution towards the cost of a course previously undertaken.

The **Learner Statement** shows the actual funding the Government has put towards an individuals learning. This information is verified from LSC data sources.

Both the Funding Indicator and the Learner Statement can also include the course fees the learner has made themselves.

A government contribution statement ( [question 11](#)) estimates the level of government contribution to a course an individual is interested in.

**Q28. What should an individual do if they feel the type of funding is incorrect? e.g. displays fully funded when it should be co-funded**

An individual can challenge the accuracy of the data provided for their Learner Statement by contacting the Careers Advice Service on 0800 100 900. Action will not be instant so they should be advised it might take a few weeks for this information to be amended.

The Learner Statement will only refer to information from 2008 onwards as current trials only collect data this far back.

**Q29. Why would the cumulative totals differ on each page?**

The cumulate total is the total value of government contributions up to the date selected and is updated annually.

**Q30. What is the Learning Record?**

A Learning Record allows an individual to track their skills development. An **Unverified Learning Record** allows an individual to add details of any previous learning achievements, hobbies and interests and any courses they are currently undertaking so that individuals are able to use it confidently when talking to employers.

The **Verified Learning Record** displays accredited learning achieved by the individual and verified by approved learning providers. This utilises the Unique Learner Number (ULN) to identify learners through Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) data set of services. It can take up to four months to display achievements from the date of award. Only records starting **from 2007/08 academic year onwards** are available.

**Q31. Why would an individual's Verified Learning Record be displayed blank?**

There are a number of reasons why the Verified Learning Record appears blank:

- The MIAP pilot refers to data from 2007/08 onwards. There may not be any details recorded for the individual
- Not all listed qualifications may appear on the MIAP record
- The ULN has not been entered during registration so the information can not be matched
- There may be a time delay of about 6 weeks from registering for a Skills Account for the details to be visible
- The details on Skills Accounts are different to those held on MIAP for the individual. In this instance the adviser should check whether the individual has recently changed name or address. If yes, the individual should either update their details on Skills Accounts directly or via their learning provider
- The learner may have requested that they do not wish to share their personal data when enrolling on their course via the Fair Processing Notice (FPN). If this is the case, their learning information will not appear in their Learning Record. The learner should contact their learning provider to change this.

### **Q32. What is the Unique Learner Number (ULN)?**

The Unique Learner Number (ULN) is a 10 digit number that allows students over the age of 14, to build a lifelong record of their learning participation and achievements, which they can access securely and choose to share if they wish to. It will not provide access to any details relating to exclusions or expulsions.

Unlike the Unique Pupil Number system which cannot be used beyond school age, the Unique Learner Number (ULN) will follow learners throughout their life, easing transition from 6th form into further education. The use of the ULN as a single candidate number will also reduce many administrative burden and costs for schools and colleges, for example when it comes to organising examinations or sharing pupil data with other educational establishments.

The ULN is a different and separate number to the Skills Account number allocated to the individual. This will be displayed on the individuals Skills Account; however, the ULN will not be presented on the Skills Account in order to protect the learner.

### **Q33. What information will be recorded on the Verified Learning Record?**

Only accredited school and further education learning and achievement records starting **from 2007/08 academic year onwards** are stored. For example, GCSEs, A/S levels, NVQs, Apprenticeships and other further education course information is available. Higher education information such as degrees is not available.

### **Q34. What should an individual do if the information within their Verified Learning Record is wrong?**

An individual can challenge the accuracy of the data provided for their Verified Learning Record by contacting the Careers Advice Service on 0800 100 900. Action will not be instant so the individual should be advised it might take a few weeks for this information to be amended.

### **Q35. Who else can see this information?**

Only the individual has access to the Learning Record. However, they can share this information should they wish to.

### **Q36. How can an individual obtain a Skills Action Plan?**

A Skills Action Plan is a personal development plan that is created after an individual has a one to one skills assessment with a **nextstep** adviser. The skills assessment session may include the use of the online Skills Diagnostic Tool. The individual will be offered a Skills Account where the Skills Action Plan can be viewed. This Skills Action Plan can only be amended by the **nextstep** Adviser. Only Skills Action Plans completed after 3 August 2009 with a **nextstep** adviser can be viewed through a Skills Account.

Individuals may also produce their own personal **Action Plan** from within their Skills Account via the online **Skills Diagnostic Tool**. The online **Skills Diagnostic tool** is only available to individuals that have a Skills Account.

**Q37. I've heard that a new entitlement to support carers and low income families is available via Skills Accounts, how does this work and how do I get more information?**

The Skills Accounts trial is aimed at testing products and processes to support individuals into learning and skills relevant to work. During 2009/10 Skills Accounts will, in certain regions, target key groups of potential learners. This includes those who are currently excluded from the workforce due to caring responsibilities or those on low incomes. An additional grant of up to £500 for fees will be offered to support those eligible learners in the South West, North East and North West regions.

**Q38. Who is eligible and how can I access the grant?**

For further information providers in the South West, North East and North West regions only should speak to their Regional LSC contact.

**Q39. How can I get involved with Skills Accounts?**

We are currently working with regional partners and other stakeholders on how best to extend the Skills Accounts trials. However, final timings and scope of further enhancements to the trial are still under discussion. We hope to have finalised this over the next few months. For further information contact your regional LSC office.

**Q40. I am a private training providers can I get involved with the Skills Accounts trial?**

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. For further information contact your regional LSC office.

**Q41. What do I do if I have problems uploading the Skills Account batch file?**

In the first instance learning providers should contact their regional support teams who will assist.