



Communications briefing for 08/09 Trials

July 2009

Purpose

This pack has been prepared for use by LSC, DBIS, Strategic Partners, providers and those involved in the forthcoming Skills Accounts trials. It will provide the latest communications material, including messages and some FAQs and works in conjunction with the factual briefing on the trials. This document be next be updated in October for the 2009/10 trials. We welcome your input and contributions.

For updates, questions and input please contact:

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KEY HEADLINE INFORMATION

1. A Skills Account is a personalised service that allows individuals to access a range of careers information and advice about how to improve their skills and access financial support. As the service develops over the year, individuals will be able to access:
 - a. Support from careers information and advice services, so that individuals can understand their options when deciding about their skills and careers.
 - b. A secure record of their learning, that can, with the individual's permission, be shared so that they can review their skills and choose the courses and the qualifications they need to progress.
 - c. Their Learner Statement showing the actual funding that the Government has put towards their learning (if appropriate).
2. Skills Accounts will play an important role in supporting both learners and those seeking employment. In the East Midlands, South East and West Midlands we are trialling a 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.
3. 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. 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 need to be tested within the wider context of an Integrated Employment and Skills service; hence the reason why they are being included within these specific trials. Employability Skills Programme Providers and **nextstep** advisers will be helping customers to open Skills Accounts within the context of the IES Trials in 2009/10.
4. In developing Skills Accounts, we have been careful to learn the lessons that led to the closure of the Individual Learner Accounts programme. For Skills Accounts the contracting and payment mechanisms will be based on mainstream LSC processes through the adult learner responsiveness (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 – FAQs

THE SKILLS ACCOUNT CONCEPT

1. [What is a Skills Account?](#)

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

By highlighting the actual value of their chosen course we aim to encourage more learners to invest in their own skills. In introducing Skills Accounts we are not altering any of the existing eligibility criteria or entitlements. A Skills Account will also include 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. As the service develops the range of products and services will increase so that a Skills Accounts becomes the one-stop-shop for learning.

Each Skills Account holder will also have a Unique Learner Number (ULN) which will be used to link the different services and build a verified record of learning. The individual will be able to create a password of their own, in order to be able to access the service via the Skills Accounts website.

BACKGROUND

2. [What is the history of the 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 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."*

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. The ALA trial has provided us with some valuable lessons which we have used to inform the design of the Skills Accounts trials:

- Ensuring that all individuals understand the full value of their account and the services available to support them
- The importance of a fully integrated service across all delivery partners

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.

4. [What has been done to remedy the issues that surrounded the Individual Learner Account trial?](#)

The Skills Accounts trials have thoroughly addressed each of the issues that resulted in the closure of the original Individual Learner Accounts programme. The payment mechanisms will be 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. Eligibility for support is in line with existing policies and entitlements.

TRIALS

5. [What is the purpose of the trial? What is the expected outcome of the trial stage?](#)

The purpose of the trial is to test arrangements for providing individuals with a high quality Skills Accounts service. Our focus is firmly on the quality of the customer experience and we have therefore avoided setting specific targets for the take-up of Skills Accounts. We have of course modelled volumes that we expect to open an Account, but we will not do this at the expense of quality. Once we have established that the service is working well we seek to expand the rollout.

6. 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 February 2009. During the first year we will be evaluating the performance of the service so that we are able to carefully expand Skills Accounts to the other regions of England during 2009/10 in a carefully planned manner. A full national rollout will begin in 2010, from when we will gradually increase numbers so that Skills Accounts are fully rolled out by 2015 throughout England.

7. [Why were the South East and East Midlands regions chosen for universal trials?](#)

We were keen to build on the experience gained in developing and delivering ALAs and therefore felt it was important to build on the expertise in these two regions. We were also mindful of the fact that many FE Colleges, who had helped develop ALAs, were very keen to take forward Skills Accounts. The regions participating in the IES trials; the West Midlands and the South East were selected after consultation between regional and national office colleagues, in conjunction with DWP and Jobcentre Plus.

8. [What if the trial fails?](#)

Whilst we do not believe the trials will fail, 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. In addition we have also commissioned an independent evaluation of its performance.

9. **What will Skills Accounts be called in the trial stage?**

Skills Accounts will be called just that, Skills Accounts, throughout the trial stage in 08/09. Further research into future branding, including the name, will continue as the trial expands this year as part of the Adult Advancement and Careers Service.

10. **How many individuals are expected to take part in the trial period? What is the projected available capacity of Skills Accounts in each of the trial areas?**

There are no targets in terms of volumes for the Skills Accounts 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. We would not expect all of individuals who open their Skills Account through the trials to progress directly into learning.

HOW WILL SKILLS ACCOUNTS BE DELIVERED?

11. **How will individuals access Skills Accounts?**

Skills Accounts must be accessible in a variety of ways depending on the individuals' preference. We will continue to test registration through Strategic Partners; **nextstep**, for face to face services; and via the Careers Advice Service on 0800 100 900. In December 2008, an online service was introduced which allows individuals to open their own Skills Account through the Directgov website (www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts). As the Skills Account service develops, the online offer will become more closely integrated and aligned with other information and services delivered through Directgov – for example, Careers Advice content. Those learners that do not have access to the internet will be able to open their Skills Account at a **nextstep** office. The Careers Advice Service (CAS) currently provides assistance in the registration process. Future developments will include the ability for CAS to open the Skills Account on behalf of the individual.

12. **How and where can a learner sign up for a Skills Account?**

Learners can sign up for a Skills Account at one of the many Strategic Learning Providers taking part in the trials. Learning Providers who are taking part in the trials will inform learners during the enrolment process, if they are one of the Strategic Partner providers, registering individuals for Skills Accounts.

Additionally, individuals are able to open their Skills Account online at www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts. Those without internet access can open a Skills Account via their local **nextstep** office or can obtain information upon the trials via the Careers Advice Service telephone helpline on 0800 100 900. For further detail, please refer to the Guidance for Delivery Partners.

13. **Who will be responsible for co-ordinating all activities?**

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) 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 DBIS and the DWP.

14. **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 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. 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

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

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

16. **I have heard that I could be eligible for £7,000 of funding for learning. Could you provide some clarity?**

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 some £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 individuals chosen course.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

17. **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 and banners. 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.

18. **What communications materials are available?**

There are numerous communications materials available for partners and Stakeholders on the LSC's Campaign Resources Site (lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources), which include a learner leaflet; advertisement and presentation templates; letter and document templates and posters. Stakeholders can also receive a 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 shagufta.mustafa@lsc.gov.uk to be included upon the Skills Accounts mailing list.

19. **When will you start communicating about Skills Accounts to the press?**

The LSC and DBIS are drawing up a full Communications Plan prior to the national roll-out of Skills Accounts in 2010. Until then, all press enquiries regarding Skills Accounts should be directed to the LSC Press Office on 02476 823 515.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE

20. Is there be 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.

21. 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 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.

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

Throughout 2008/09, a series of workshops and seminars have taken place to inform Stakeholders about the trials. Training has been introduced and is still available to assist **nextstep** advisers locally and the Careers Advice Service nationally, as well as learning providers' frontline staff. As the Skills Accounts trial expands for 2009/10 a planned programme of training and briefings will be made available for all Stakeholders.

THE ROLE OF FE COLLEGES

23. The Skills Voucher will be 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 trial intends to phase out the voucher through 2009/10 and replace it with 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 users to print off the voucher to hand in to a provider as was tested in 2008/09. 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.

Further guidance will be published before the changes are implemented to the website in October 2009.

24. How will you ensure that learners have access to the most accurate information?

The National Learning Directory (NLD) will be 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: <http://www.advice-resources.co.uk/>

25. [How can schools / colleges / universities get involved if they want to? Where can they find additional information?](#)

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 an individual who has opened a Skills Account and thinks they may be entitled to Government funding.

An e-bulletin will be sent to Strategic Partners & Stakeholders on the last Friday of each month to keep them informed about the trials.

26. [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 partners should not require any additional staff.

STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS

27. [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? How many have been involved – both in terms of Stakeholders and individuals?](#)

Briefings have taken place within both regions with providers that offered ALAs. 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.

The External Stakeholder Reference Group led by DBIS is working with key Stakeholders in the design, implementation and promotion of a coherent, joint offer for Skills Accounts and the aacs. 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 throughout 2009/10.

28. [What is the level of understanding and buy-in from the Strategic Partners/employees?](#)

Briefings to Strategic Partners have been taking place throughout the first 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. Thematic sub-groups will involve an array of Strategic Partner representatives. This will help information to be shared within the Strategic Partner's organisation.

BROADER INDIVIDUAL OFFER

29. [What careers information and advice support is now available to individuals to help them open a Skills Account?](#)

Individuals can access a range of careers information and advice services and support to open a Skills Account, including information on learning opportunities through either local **nextstep** services (contact the LSC Region in the first instance for details of local **nextstep** services) or nationally via the telephone through the Careers Advice Service on 0800 100 900.

30. [How is the adult advancement and careers service \(aacs\) developing and will there be regular exchanges of information as the two are mutually dependent?](#)

The aacs will be launched during autumn 2010. It will be integral to the delivery of Skills Accounts. In developing Skills Accounts we are working very closely with aacs policy teams to ensure that the two services are aligned and integrated in a way which works best for the individual.

DATA PROTECTION

31. What steps are taken to protect my data?

The Learning and Skills Council and DBIS take Data Protection matters extremely seriously and the LSC is registered as a Data Controller with the Information Commissioner for the purposes of handling your 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 your data are reviewed regularly for security purposes in accordance with Government requirements. LSC staff designated to handle your data receive training in Data Protection requirements. Should you have any questions regarding how we handle your data, you can make enquiries of the LSC under our Privacy Policy (<http://skillsaccounts.direct.gov.uk/Terms.aspx>)

SUCCESS MEASURES AND EVALUATION

32. How will success be measured once Skills Accounts are implemented?

The evaluation results produced during the trials will contribute to the Skills Accounts development process. The evaluation will consider whether the systems have added value to the individual's experience and whether the aims of the trial have been achieved.

In the long term, the aim is that Skills Accounts will help create a "culture of learning", by motivating individuals to take-up, invest and progress in learning, and to continue with their chosen courses and achieve more when they do. Skills Accounts are also intended to impact on "the system", driving a high quality FE sector that responds to individuals' demands, as well as contributing to the integration of employment and skills.

DBIS and LSC are undertaking analytical work through a data review and focus groups to strengthen our understanding of why different groups take up Skills Accounts, which will go towards informing our approach to evaluation and developing a full benefits realisation plan.

Below are listed:

- Some of the anticipated strategic benefits of the fully rolled-out product which were identified in the Business Case for the 08/09 trials
- Some evaluation indicators which are being used to assess if the strategic benefits are being delivered, divided into two categories; shorter or longer term indicators, both of which will be used to evaluate both the 08/09 trials and the fully rolled-out product.

Strategic Benefits

Individuals

- Will be more motivated to take up and progress in learning that releases their talents and realises their potential in work and life
- Will be more likely to invest in skills training
- Will have a greater commitment to learning – will continue with their chosen courses and achieve better results
- Access to a personal resource which an individual can manage containing information and advice on skills, careers and financial support all in one place
- Ability to input the information once but use again and again, adapting it to meet individual needs. (e.g. action planning, Learning Record and CV creation)
- Access to an online record of learning and funding easily accessible and available wherever and whenever you need them. In the future this can be shared with employers and other support organisations at the choice of the individual.

Providers

- In the future Skills Accounts will help to create a more informed learner, who is more likely and better placed to take advantage of the adult learning offer, driving up improved recruitment and retention
- Tools such as the Skills and Interest Assessment supports the enrolment process, ensuring that learners are accessing provision that will support them into work linked to their current skills and interests
- The Course Search gives you access to more learners if you make full use of the NLD.
- The Funding Indicator helps individuals understand and appreciate the actual cost of courses. By helping individuals understand and appreciate the cost of training and the investment involved, it will encourage them to think carefully about the commitment and the importance of making an informed decision about their particular needs.
- Skills Accounts will provide clients with the tools and information to help them move onto positive outcomes, both training and for work. This helps you to achieve successful and sustainable outcomes for your clients and contracts.

Employers

- Will see the motivational value of training in their employees and will be willing to train more
- Will experience greater efficiency in the recruitment process as, due to the Approved Learning Record, they no longer have to spend time verifying an individual's qualifications

aacs, Jobcentre Plus and **nextstep**

- Will be able to provide better advice and support to individuals through a shared data source on individual aspirations and achievements
- Will, through MIAP's facilitation of better information-sharing, be able to target and tailor their services to meet the needs of individuals and employers

Evaluation Indicators

Shorter term (some evidence can be gathered during the trials)

- High and positive response rate to Skills Accounts marketing, and high individual awareness of Skills Accounts
- Learners feel better informed owing to better careers information and advice
- High learner satisfaction with Skills Accounts and, where appropriate, with Jobcentre Plus and **nextstep**
- Improved attitudes to learning as financial and information barriers are removed
- Increased conversion rates from careers information and advice contacts into learning
- Increased conversion rates from Jobcentre Plus (JCP) contacts into learning
- Increased number of Skills Account holders who invest their own money
- High provider satisfaction with MIAP systems
- Effective co-operation between the Careers Advice Service, Jobcentre Plus and **nextstep**

Longer term (very limited evidence can be gathered during the trials)

- Increases in achievement associated with Skills Accounts
- Increased completion and progression rates for individuals with Skills Accounts
- Decrease in number of drop-outs
- Better quality of overall provider provision
- Providers offer courses that individual's demand, in the format required by individuals

- New providers enter the market
- Increase in amounts invested by employers in training
- Increased amount of Apprenticeships offered by employers

33. **What sorts of incentives are available to stakeholders and individuals who take part in the trial? Will they have the opportunity to feedback through a formal process? How will this information be utilised? What will they gain?**

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.

For individuals, careers information and advice services are available, including information on learning opportunities and financial information in one place; offering them an opportunity to find the information they need to take control of their learning and development.

For learning providers, 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 and what they need to do to adapt and compete in the demand/choice led funding environment we are moving into.

For Careers Advice Services there will be opportunities to embed the necessary business processes and systems that will need to develop to meet the changes ahead. Through trialling aspects of the new aacs, they will also be able to help mould future policy surrounding FE as we move to meet the Leitch Targets.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

aacs – Adult Advancement and Careers Service

ALA – Adult Learner Accounts

Careers information and advice services – Currently provided by **nextstep** & the Careers Advice Service (CAS)

Employment Skills Programme (ESP)

IES – Integrated Employment & Skills

ILA – Individual Learning Accounts

MIAP – Managing Information Across Partners

Universal Trials – offer available to all adults

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