

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN

Awareness week to drive adults back to learning

Date of issue 15 May, 2008

Saturday (17th May) marks the launch of Adult Learners' Week 2008, an annual week-long national campaign, celebrated in more than 40 countries, to inspire people to pursue adult learning.

With a wide range of options available, including free literacy and numeracy courses for those that missed out on qualifications at school right through to hairdressing, media and technology courses, thousands of adults aged 19-plus are already reaping the benefits of going back to learning.

As part of the week, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will also be raising awareness of the Adult Learning Grant (ALG). Designed for those adults thinking about learning, the ALG gives eligible adults up to £30 a week to help with extra costs that learning can bring such as travel and books.

Since the national roll out in September 2007, more than 16,000 people have received ALG. However, there are still thousands of adults who could be taking advantage of the grants to either catch up on skills not learned at school, to learn for work, or to learn for fun.

Recent research has shown that more than half of adults (52%) in the South West want to learn in the future, yet a third (33%) have admitted they feel that money – or a lack off it – is the main factor holding them back from achieving their goals.

Malcolm Gillespie, LSC Regional Director - South West, said: “Many of us recognise the importance of continued learning throughout our adult lives but feel restricted by money pressures. Personal development, however, needn’t be a financial strain as many people could be eligible for financial support whilst studying.

“There are also long-term financial benefits of going back to learning. Learning a new skill, or even just enhancing those you already have, in fact, increases your worth and could even result in a £2,000 to £3,000 increase in annual salary. Adult Learning Week is the perfect opportunity to stop and think seriously about the benefits of going back to learning and explore the financial grants available.”

Beyond the attractive financial benefits of securing your future through personal development, learning a new skill can also boost confidence. In the South West, 76% of women questioned said that passing an exam or gaining a qualification was most likely to give them long-term self-confidence. This opinion was shared by 67% of men.

And with less than a quarter of people feeling ‘very good’ about their confidence levels at their current job and less than 1 in 5 feeling ‘very good’ about work satisfaction, going back to learning and gaining qualifications could be the answer to improving your self-esteem in the workplace.

Malcolm Gillespie also stressed the importance of adult learning for employers in the South West in terms of the impact that investing in vocational skills or qualifications can have on skills gaps within organisations as well as enhancing productivity and competitiveness.

He said: “One of the biggest costs to a business is staffing and continued learning is one of the tools employers can use to help develop and retain staff as well as maintain their productivity. However, taking time out of the business for learning can impact on resourcing. So for employers wanting to improve employees’ skills, there are a large number of courses that are run in conjunction with the company’s day-to-day working, meaning staff can learn while they work. These include higher level foundation degree courses which can be taken in modules and are sponsored by employers.

“Those embracing learning opportunities really can make a difference to their work situation by improving their knowledge, skills and overall motivation whether in their current role or if they are looking to move up the ladder. Adult learning can offer people the chance to make that change.”

More information about the Adult Learning Grant can be found by visiting www.direct.gov.uk/alg or calling **0800 100 900**.

Note to editors:

Adult Learning Grant (ALG)

ALG was launched in September 2007. The amount of payment is up to £30 per week depending on household income.

Who is eligible?

Eligibility is dependant upon:

- age, residential location and the location of study
- The type of course being undertaken
- The level of income and whether the applicant is in receipt of certain types of benefit

Applicants must:

- be 19 or over (though you can apply one month before your 19th birthday)
- be living and studying in England, and meet the residency criteria (there's more information about this in the ALG application pack)

Key facts

- There are around 6 million people in England who are economically active who do not have a level 2 qualification and around 5 million of them are in employment.
- In England there are currently 31,300 adults studying full time for a first L2 qualification and 72,900 adults studying full time for a first L3.
- Evaluation of ALG shows that 15% of recipients would not or probably would not have taken their course without ALG
- 27% of ALG learners have been influenced to undertake full-time rather than part-time learning by the grant
- Around 93% of ALG recipients completed their 2005/06 learning. This is higher than the average FE retention rate of around 85%. Some Learning Providers are reporting 100% retention rate for their ALG learners.
- 96 % of ALG recipients receive the maximum grant of £30 per week
- 80% of ALG recipients are learning at Level 3
- 83% of ALG recipients are aged between 19-25 years old
- The male/female ratio is currently 52% female, 48% male.
- 20% of ALG learners are from ethnic minority groups

Adult Learners' Week:

Adult Learners' Week is organised by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and is supported by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the European Social Fund. It has additional support from learndirect and Ofcom.

Launched in 1992, it is the UK's largest and longest running not-for-profit learning celebration. The week encourages thousands of adults, whatever their age and background, to give learning a go: whether it's learning for pleasure, catching up on skills missed out on at school or getting that new job or promotion. It also celebrates the learning achievements of those adults already learning and brings their inspirational stories to a wider audience.

Learning and Skills Council (LSC):

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for 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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