

## **Skills Funding Agency**

### **Communications Briefing:**

#### **Introduction to Next Step, the adult careers service**

*Last updated September 2011*

##### ***Purpose of the document***

This Communications Briefing, as part of a communications toolkit, has been prepared for use by the Skills Funding Agency, BIS, strategic partners, prime contractors, providers and those involved in the delivery of Next Step.

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##### ***Vision***

Our vision is for millions of individuals to enjoy more rewarding lives. We want to create a culture where careers development and acquiring new skills is the norm. This will improve individuals' lives and society as a whole, which in turn will increase productivity and boost the economy.

Next Step, the adult careers service, will give everyone access to the best information and advice supported by resources to enable make more effective choices about skills, careers, work and life. Information, advice and resources will be available online, as well as through advisers on the telephone and face-to-face.

##### ***How to describe Next Step in sixty seconds :***

- Next Step is available to all adults, 19 and over, (or 18 and over if a Jobcentre Plus customer) in England; online, by telephone, or face-to-face, as a single service under a new brand.
- Next Step will provide information, advice and resources to help adults make more effective choices about skills, careers, work and life.
- Customers will be able to open a Lifelong Learning Account which is a free personal online space to help manage learning and careers including saving CVs and searches, storing personal action plans and checking funding and learning.

- Next Step will promote aspiration, by giving people the power to improve their skills, and through that, their lives. As well as providing information and expert advice, the service will encourage and support people to help themselves, and to remove the barriers that stand in their way.
- Through one online channel, adults will be able to assess their skills, aptitudes and interests; look at labour market information; find a suitable course; find out how much Government funding could be available to support them; look at information about careers; and register for their personal online space, where individuals can store and manage personal information on their skills development, achievements, careers, financial support and a CV in one easily accessible location, that is private to them.
- Through a Lifelong Learning Account they will be able to see a secure record of their accredited learning and also record other learning experiences.
- In addition to using the website those individuals who require additional support can speak to an adviser on the telephone or face-to-face.
- For those with greatest need, we will provide more intensive and ongoing support.
- Next Step is inclusive and delivery will be shaped in response to customers' needs. Advisers will take responsibility for each customer's experience, and we will work to ensure there are no barriers to accessing the service for specific groups.
- People receiving out of work benefits who need skills training to move into sustainable employment will be referred to Next Step by Jobcentre Plus.

### ***Our brand: Why we exist***

### **Our vision – what we plan to achieve in the next 3-5 years**

For millions of individuals to enjoy more rewarding working lives; and to create a culture where career development and acquiring new skills is the norm. This will improve the lives of individuals, society as a whole and in turn increase productivity and boost the economy.

### **Our mission – how we plan to get there**

Give everyone access to the best information, advice and resources that will help them make more effective choices about skills, careers, work and life choices.

### **Service description – how we talk about what we do**

Next Step is about changing culture – so that career development and acquiring new skills is the norm. It depends on the belief that everyone has the ability to develop and grow in their life and work.

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We are at the beginning of that journey towards culture change. The Next Step brand can help us to secure buy-in to that change from stakeholders, from delivery partners, and from frontline staff on whom we depend to deliver that change.

Next Step will give everyone access to the best information, advice and resources to make more effective choices about skills, careers, work and life. Information, advice and resources will be available online, as well as through advisers on the telephone and face-to-face. The personal secure online space will provide individuals with a space where they can store and manage their own careers and skills development.

## Branding

The Next Step brand brings together the three channels under a common identity and fuelling the potential of millions requires that we can endorse the brand values by being:

- **Enthusiastic:** positive energy is infectious. It inspires and motivates others.
- **Expert:** we need to know our stuff to deliver high-quality effective information and advice.
- **Impartial:** we only ever act in the best interests of our customers.
- **Pragmatic:** our aim is to get the job done. The right outcome is more important than the right process.

## The Brand name – Next Step

Templates for marketing and communications materials required for implementing the brand across the service are available at

<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/logoanddesignguidance/nextstep/>

## Accessing the service

Customers can access the service, including the facility to open a Lifelong learning Account, either online, by telephone or face-to-face and can choose to access the service by one or all of the channels to suit their needs. Next Step is one service, so customers will be referred or signposted between the different channels according to need.

Customers can access the service by searching online for Next Step or speaking to a Next Step adviser or booking a face-to-face appointment by calling 0800 100 900 from 8am – 10pm 7 days a week. Open a Lifelong Learning Account by visiting [direct.gov.uk/lifelonglearningaccount](http://direct.gov.uk/lifelonglearningaccount).

## The offer

Next Step, the adult careers service, is available to all adults in England, aged 19 or over, (or 18 or over for Jobcentre Plus/Connexions customers or an offender in custody). The service can be accessed online, or with the help of an adviser either on the telephone or face-to-face. People who require more intensive, ongoing support will receive support on the basis of their needs. The service will work in close partnership with Jobcentre Plus in order to provide intensive support for Jobcentre Plus customers.

Next Step will provide a core offer of labour market focused careers and skills information and advice and the facility to open a Lifelong Learning Account for customers to access their personal secure online space, accessed face-to-face, by telephone, or online. Next Step operates in a national, regional and local context, working closely with Jobcentre Plus and other local partners. It will be steered by regional priorities and provide advice in a labour market context informed by high quality, up to date labour market information.

Next Step will offer to everyone, via the channel that they choose:

- professional information and advice on careers and skills
- access to up-to-date labour market information, which reflects national, sectoral, regional and local intelligence
- a personal Skills Health Check that will provide the individual with an assessment; this online tool will diagnose an individual's strengths and areas of development
- information to raise awareness of an individual's potential entitlements to public funding to support learning
- access to up-to-date information on courses, through the Next Step Course Directory
- more detailed careers information and advice, such as information about the qualifications and skills required for roles, funding options, returning to work, and childcare;
- support to enable individuals to manage their own careers and help them get on in work and life, including support to open a Lifelong Learning Account, their personal secure online space;
- the Lifelong learning Account is a place where individuals can store and manage personal information on their skills development, achievements, careers and financial support and a CV in one easily accessible secure location
- the ability to book telephone or face-to-face careers and skills advice sessions
- referral to and from a wide range of relevant and specialist services and agencies, including appropriate websites, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, housing associations, debt advice agencies, community legal advice.



## National priority groups

In addition to the services available to all adults to access as they choose, there will be national priority groups for the face-to-face service element of Next Step who will be eligible to receive intensive and ongoing face-to-face support (listed below). A Next Step adviser will identify whether the customer meets the criteria for a national priority group.

- Low skilled adults (without a Level 2 qualification) who are locked in low skilled, low-prospects jobs – especially women
- Young adults aged 19-24 without a Level 3 qualification
- Adults facing redundancy, newly unemployed or at a distance from the labour market
- Jobcentre Plus customers in receipt of out of work benefits
- People from ethnic minority communities
- Older people
- Carers as defined by Department of Health guidelines
- Offenders in custody and in the community under the supervision of probation services, and ex-offenders
- People with learning difficulties or disabilities (including those with mental health conditions).

## Web based tools and services

The web service will provide the first point of contact with the service for many customers. Customers will be able to access the following tools and services on the website:

- **Skills Health Check**, using psychometric techniques to enable individuals to diagnose and assess their skills, abilities, personal attributes and preferences, and career and work objectives;
- **CV builder**, providing a variety of templates for effective CV structure and headings, with guidance on how to complete a CV;
- **labour market information**, including:
  - sector information provided by Sector Skills Councils, and updated on a quarterly basis
  - comprehensive information on career paths, setting out the qualifications, skills and experience required for specific careers and jobs.
- **course search**, enabling individuals to search the Next Step Course Directory with access to course information for all colleges, private and third sector training providers accredited to receive public funding by the Skills Funding Agency, and information on provider quality drawn from the Framework for Excellence
- **entitlement checker** enabling individuals to get information on their potential entitlement to public funding for training, covering support with tuition fees

and learner support funds to help with other costs (transport, childcare, books and equipment)

- a wide range of online **information and advice** including access to advisers via email and web forum and articles on relevant work and skills issues
- a Lifelong Learning Account, a free personal online space to help manage learning and careers including saving CVs and searches, storing personal action plans and checking funding and learning.

### **Contracting and performance management**

The Skills Funding Agency is responsible for the commissioning, contracting and performance management of Next Step. It is a clear requirement that all contractors operate as one service for the benefit of their customers, using shared branding, tools and IT infrastructure and facilitating signposting and referral between the telephone, face-to-face and web services in response to customer needs. The service is delivered by 13 prime contractors.

### **Components of the Service**

The major components of the service are:

- Information and advice to help a customer choose or change career
- Providing up to date national, regional and local, sectoral labour market information
- Detailed careers information such as qualifications and skills required for roles
- Providing personalised skills assessment and advice on how to find and access learning
- Advice to find and enrol on a course
- The ability to search for a course using Course Finder
- Access information on provider quality
- Equipping customers to successfully apply for a job
- Example tools: CV builder / Interview advice / Local labour market information
- Links to JCP
- Information and advice related to funding or eligibility for funding
- Information and advice on Learner Support programmes and Child Care
- Specialist help, advice and referrals to partners and specialist advice services e.g. returning to work, Citizens Advice Bureau, housing associations, Childcare, legal advice, debt advice etc.
- A Lifelong Learning Account, a secure personal online space where individuals can store and manage their own information



## Next Step Course Directory

The Next Step Course Directory assists individuals in searching for learning opportunities to enable them to make more effective choices about skills, careers, work and life. It is essential that the directory is kept up-to-date by providers so that individuals have the best chance of finding the information they need.

## Capacity

The capacity to handle requests for information and advice has been increased in 2009-10 in response to the economic downturn, and increased demand for careers advice from adults at risk of redundancy or recently unemployed. We expect, in the current economic circumstances, to maintain the capacity in the face-to-face channel in 2010-11 at broadly its current target level, helping around **700,000** individuals and delivering **over 1 million** advice sessions. However, we aim to increase the capacity of the telephone channel so that the service can handle 1 million calls per annum and **250,000 emails** seeking advice. The online channel of the service will have capacity to handle up to 20 million sessions per annum.

We will set a benchmark for Next Step, that 50% of all customers who create an action plan with an adviser or through the online channel should enter training, get sustainable employment or progress in work.

Within that, the face-to-face channel of the service will operate to a set of national outcome targets/key performance indicators (KPIs). These will encourage the effective targeting of this constrained resource where it is most required and a focus on good outcomes for individual customers. The targets are:

- 40% of face-to-face service users to enter learning or training;
- 30% of face-to-face service users to enter sustainable employment;
- 15% of face-to-face service users to progress in work;
- 45% of face-to-face service users to become qualified to a higher level; and
- an expectation that at least 15% of face-to-face service users to have a learning difficulty or disability that could adversely affect their participation in work.

## Stakeholder engagement

A joint stakeholder strategy and activity plan has been agreed between BIS and the Skills Funding Agency. This has been developed to engage with key external stakeholders and promote the benefits of Next Step, allowing collaboration to build a better service for everyone. The Skills Funding Agency will deliver the strategy and BIS will continue to support.

## Workforce engagement

A strategy has been developed to engage with the workforce of the Skills Funding Agency and the learning provider network, Next Step prime contractors, Jobcentre Plus staff, including IES providers, the YPLA and strategic partners. It will deliver a communications toolkit and internal engagement programme to build awareness and support for the service amongst internal audiences. It will also enable providers to fully understand their relationship with the branded service.

#### **External communications**

External communications will primarily concentrate on reaching potential customers of the service, although it will inevitably touch on and inform both the stakeholder and workforce communications and potential channels to reach these customers. The plan will prioritise target audiences utilising customer research.

#### **Contact and further information**

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