



FAQs: Providers of Skills Accounts

August 2010



These FAQs are intended as a resource for all delivery partners of Skills Accounts including learning providers and Next Step advisers.

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
- the ability to assess current skills & interests and develop an 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 currently being trialled across England. The functionality within Skills Accounts will shortly transition into the Next Step website.

www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts

www.direct.gov.uk/nextstep

Q2. Who is eligible for a skills Account?

Skills Accounts are available to all adults in England aged 19 years and over. However, in certain trial areas Jobcentre Plus clients aged 18 years and over are also eligible. There is no upper age limit. In certain geographical areas, parts of the offer are restricted to specific target groups.

Q3. Where can an individual get access to and open a Skills account

Skills Accounts are now available throughout England. The current Skills Account trial focuses on testing and evaluating systems and processes across the different delivery channels.

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

1. Open an account online through www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts
2. Next Step face to face or telephone services can register a Skills Account for an individual
3. Those providers in receipt of Skills Funding Agency adult learner responsive funds will be offering Skills Accounts to targeted groups of learners. In addition, providers delivering the Young Persons Guarantee and ESP Providers are supporting learners in opening a Skills Account.

In addition, all providers and in fact other stakeholders may wish to promote and encourage their learners or customers to take up a Skills Account by visiting the website as above.

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

No; Skills Accounts are currently optional

Q5. Will there be help for those individuals who have barriers with the use of IT?

Yes, support in opening the account is available for this client group from either Next Step advisers or providers (see Question 3)

Q6. What is the future of Skills Accounts?

Skills Accounts have been successfully trialled over the last two years with over 100,000 applications for a Skills Account processed. This demonstrates a clear demand from learners for a service to empower them to take control of their learning and working lives.

August saw the launch of Next Step, the new integrated adult careers service. Initially the telephone and face-to-face elements of the new service are integrated. We will soon be introducing a brand new Next Step website as part of the single service; in the meantime, customers can access online resources through the Careers Advice and Skills Accounts sites. The functionality contained within Skills Accounts will transition to the Next Step website, once live.

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. (See question 2)

Skills Accounts are not a funding stream and hold no monetary value. One of the key objectives of Skills accounts however, is to help individuals to understand and access the government funding entitlement to a particular chosen learning course. Whilst normal Skills Funding Agency funding eligibility applies, this indicative 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 Skills Funding Agency Adult Learner Responsive and Employer Responsive funds as well as Learner Support Funds.

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 learner makes the declarations regarding eligibility on the Skills Account website. 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 (course fees) 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.

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 adviser as to whether their entitlement to benefit will be affected.

Q11. What will a Skills Accounts cost an individual?

Nothing; it's a free service.

Data Protection

Q12. 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 Skills Funding Agency by email, mail or phone, as part of our efforts to monitor performance, improve quality and plan future provision of training and education.

Q13. 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.

Q14. 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.

Q15. How secure are the passwords and usernames and what should individuals do if they believe they have been lost or stolen?

It is essential that personal data such as passwords and usernames are kept secure. Individuals should be advised when creating their username and password to avoid using variations of their name and birthday as these can often be guessed. It should be stressed that individuals log out of their account when they are finished and do not leave their account unattended.

If individuals believe that their password has been stolen or compromised, they should change it as soon as possible and follow the instructions through the Account section of the website. An email (if given at time of registration) will then be sent to the individual to inform them that the password has changed. If such a notice is received without the individuals knowledge the Skills Account helpline should be contacted on 0800 100 900 as soon as possible.

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 Next Step 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 Skills Funding Agency contact.

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

Get in touch with your Skills Funding Agency contact or your Prime Contractor.

Q18. Will there be training events for providers?

Yes; please speak to your Skills Funding Agency contact for further information.

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

Specific guidance is available for providers when communicating with individuals and for raising awareness with staff. This can be found via “Provider Update” available from the Skills Funding Agency.

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. The opening of Skills Account should be seen as part of a providers 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 and support material for providers are available from the Skills Funding Agency

Please see Skills Accounts Delivery Partners Guidance Manual for further information.

Promotion of Skills Accounts through Next Step

The Next Step leaflets reference 'registration with Next Step' as part of the offer. In the short term, until the introduction of the new Next Step careers website, we are continuing to promote Skills Accounts as part of the wider Next Step offer. To avoid confusion for Next Step customers, we would ask Prime Contractors to ensure that Next Step advisers explain the situation to their customers and continue to promote Skills Accounts (using existing Skills Accounts collateral as appropriate), and outline to their customers the benefits of opening a Skills Account. This includes the automatic transfer of information provided by customers to register for a Skills Account to the Next Step website once available.

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 **Skills Health Check** that provides an objective assessment of an individuals 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 Skills assessment which may include the use of the Skills Health Check with a face to face adviser and can be viewed as part of the Skills Account if applicable
- **Careers Advice Job Profiles** allows individuals to search across a range of information about the types of job they are interested in
- 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
- an eligibility checker that will produce an **indication of the government funding** contribution and support towards their chosen learning

- a **Qualifications Calculator** that shows their current level of learning to help them plan their next steps
- an **Unverified Learning Record** which allows them 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 their past achievements and qualifications to date.
- a **CV Builder** which helps individuals to create step by step their own C.V.
- 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.

Q23. How can an individual obtain a Skills Action Plan?

A **Skills Action Plan** is completed as a result of a one to one skills assessment with a Next Step adviser. The skills assessment session may include the use of the online Skills Health Check. As part of this process, the individual will be offered a Skills Account where their **Skills Action Plan** can be viewed, if the individual possesses a ULN which is matched to their Skills Account. This **Skills Action Plan** can only be amended by a Next Step adviser. Only **Skills Action Plans** completed after 3 August 2009 with a Next Step adviser can be viewed through a Skills Account.

Alternatively, individuals can produce their own personal **Action Plan** from within their Skills Account via the online **Skills Health Check**. A personal Action Plan can only be saved to an individual's Skills account if they are registered.

Q24. Can an individual complete a Skills Health Check without opening a Skills Account

A Skills Health Check can be completed by an individual by visiting a Next Step adviser or via the website without registering for a Skills Account. However if the individual is anonymous to Skills Account i.e. has not registered, the report and action plan will not be saved within the Skills Account system. Individuals can however, save this information remotely up to a period of 72 hours. A code is produced for the individual to re-enter should they wish to retrieve the information. At all times individuals should be encouraged to register for their Skills Account in order to benefit from the full offer.

Q25. The Skills Health Check has changed, what are the significant changes and are there any impacts?

The Skills Health Check has been updated. There are now seven sections to the assessment and the action plan is viewable separate to the report. Reports and action plans created previously will remain within the Skills Account as an archived file that an individual will be able to view and/ or print at any time.

Q26 Why are the old versions of the Skills Health Check reports and action plans view only?

Effectively the revised Skills Health Check is a new tool added to Skills Account. It replaces both the old Skills Diagnostic Tool and the Skills & Interest Assessment. Individuals should be encouraged to complete the new tool. Older versions will not have been deleted, as information stored within them is private to the individual account holder.

Q27. The Skills Health Check asks for the qualification level of the individual, is the assessment customised in anyway for the different levels of learners?

Text answers and summaries within the report are formulated specifically for learners with level 2 and above or level 2 and below qualifications.

Q28. 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. The current database for Skills Accounts reflects only the Skills Funding Agency provision and therefore all courses that are currently available may not be included.

Q29. What Course Search tool does Skills Account use?

The Skills Account website uses the Next Step Course Directory for course searches.

Q30. How do I get my courses available upon the Course Directory

Providers in the first instance should contact the following for further information

<http://www.coursedirectoryproviderportal.org.uk>

Q31. 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
- currently, certain courses such as ACL related courses are not being included within this tool.

Q32. What is the difference between the Funding Indicator and Learner Statement?

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 their training. Recent evidence suggests that by helping individuals to understand the cost of training and the investment involved, it will 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 individual's learning. This information is verified from Skills Funding Agency data sources.

Both the Funding Indicator and the Learner Statement can also include the contributions made by the employer or the learner has made himself or herself. (Co – funded)

Q33 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 in their Learner Statement by contacting Next Step 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 from this far back.

Q34. What is the Learning Record and why are their two different types?

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 the Learning Record Service (formerly MIAP) data set. 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.

Q35. 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 collected from 2007/08 onwards. There may not be any details recorded for the individual
- Not all listed qualifications may appear on the Learning Record Service
- The ULN has not been entered during registration so the information can not be matched to the individual
- 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 Learning Record Service 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.

Q36. 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. The ULN can be entered as part of the Skills Account registration. However, it will not be presented on the Skills Account in order to protect the learner.

Q37. 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 awarded degrees are not currently recorded.

Q38. 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 in their Verified Learning Record by contacting Next Step 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.

Q39. 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.

Q40 Can an individual have access to a CV if they are not registered for a Skills Account?

An individual will be able to produce and print a CV if not registered for a Skills Account however; they will not be able to save this to the Skills Account system. In all instances, individuals should be encouraged to open a Skills Account.

Q41. Individuals unverified Learning Record appears within the template for building a CV. why can't the verified Learning Record be transported in the same way?

External parties verify the verified Learning Record and there may be a risk that once presented within the CV, information could be adapted to falsify the accuracy to employers, etc. This may have an impact on the reputation of government agencies such as the Skills Funding Agency

Q42. How can I get involved?

We are currently working with partners and other stakeholders on the Next Step service. However, final timings and scope of further enhancements are under discussion. We hope to have finalised this over the next few months. For further information, please get in touch with your Skills Funding Agency contact.