



# **Communications briefing for 08/09 Trials**

December 2008

## **Purpose**

This pack has been prepared for use by LSC, DIUS, 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 will continue to be updated on a regular basis. 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 Skills Voucher which will indicate their eligibility for public funding and show the value of their chosen course. Where the information provided indicates that the learner may be entitled to full fee remission this will be shown on the Skills Voucher. This can then be taken to an LSC approved training provider.
  - c. 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.
2. Skills Accounts will play an important role in supporting both learners and those seeking employment. In the East Midlands and South East 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 upon 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 five locations during this year. These areas are: the West Midlands, Manchester, London, the East of England and 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 therefore need to be tested within the wider context of an integrated employment and skills service, hence the reason why they are being included within the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials.
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 – FAQ

### 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.

The Skills Voucher will be personalised and calculated using information provided by the individual. They will be able to take their Skills Voucher to a range of providers approved by the LSC to receive funding through the adult learner responsive (ALR) funding model. It should be noted that the Skills Voucher in itself is purely a motivational tool to encourage potential learners and has no monetary value.

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 learner 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 have comfortably exceeded that target. The ALA trial has already provided us with some valuable lessons which we have used to inform the design of Skills Accounts:

- Ensuring that all learners 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

Alignment of the marketing of the Accounts to learners' own aspirations, our evaluations 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 choice and the support which helps them realise this choice.
- 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 learners involved have completed their learning. Over the next 12 months, all ALAs holders will be contacted to see if they wish their ALA to be migrated onto the Skills Account system.

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

Plans for Skills Accounts 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 Account 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. **When will the trials start and how long will they go on?**

The Skills Accounts trials began implementing and testing the systems in September 2008 in the South East and East Midlands. The Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials also began in September in the West Midlands and we are currently working through arrangements about when would be best to introduce Skills Accounts into these trials. During the first year we will be evaluating the performance of the service so that we are able to make Skills Accounts available in the other regions of England from 2009/10. 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.

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 important to build on the expertise in these 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 five regions participating in the IES trials – the West Midlands, Manchester, London and the East of England 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 learners 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 learners. 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 2008/09. Further research into future branding, including the name, will continue as the trial rolls out.

10. **Are timings due to run according to plan?**

Twenty strategic partners in the East Midlands and the South East began offering newly enrolled students the opportunity to open a Skills Account in late September 2008. The Skills Accounts website was launched in December 2008.

11. **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. Based on discussions with regions we estimate that around 30-40,000 individuals might be expected to open a Skills Accounts through one of the channels. Of course, as with any advice service we would not expect all of these to progress directly in to learning. However, in order to ensure that we can run a valid evaluation of the programme we need just 4,500 individuals to open a Skills Account.

## HOW WILL SKILLS ACCOUNTS BE DELIVERED?

### 12. Will there be an online platform for Skills Accounts? When will it go online?

Skills Accounts must be accessible in a variety of ways depending on the individuals' preference. Initially we will 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](http://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 and Learner Records.

### 13. Can learners manage a Skills Account if they do not have access to the internet?

As Skills Accounts are a service for individuals, we must ensure that they can open a Skills Account in a variety of ways depending on their preference. Initially we will test registration through Strategic Partners and **nextstep** for face to face services, and for advice via the Careers Advice Service (CAS), the national careers advice helpline on 0800 100 900. There is also an online service which will allow individuals to open their own Skills Account through a web portal. 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 currently provides assistance in the registration process. Future developments will include the ability for CAS to open the Skills Account on behalf of the learner.

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

Learners can sign up for a Skills Account at one of the following Strategic Partners in the two trial regions:

**EAST MIDLANDS**

Derby College  
Leicester College  
Lincoln College  
New College Nottingham  
North Nottinghamshire  
College  
Northampton College  
South Nottingham College  
West Nottinghamshire  
College

**SOUTH EAST**

North West Kent College  
Aylesbury College  
IOW College  
Eastleigh College  
Northbrook College  
City College Brighton and  
Hove  
Fareham College  
Sussex Downs College  
Oxford and Cherwell Valley  
College  
East Surrey College  
Brighter Prospects  
JGA

Learners are able to open their Skills Account online at [www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts](http://www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts).

Learners without internet access can open a Skills Account via their local nextstep office or can obtain advice via the Careers Advice Service on 0800 100 900.

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

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) is leading on policy relating to the trials and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are leading on delivery in the South East and East Midlands.

The implementation of the IES trials is also the responsibility of the LSC in conjunction with the policy leads within DIUS and the DWP.

16. **How do you ensure the product will be easy to understand and not be too complex?**

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 roll out. Different groups of stakeholders, including learners, have been and will continue to be consulted during the testing, trialling and evaluation processes. Clear evaluation of the systems and policies will commence as the trials roll out to enable changes to be made to policy and systems as and when required.

**FUNDING**

17. **Will Skills Accounts take away funding from Train to Gain funding in any way?**

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



18. 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 would 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 chosen course.

## **COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING**

19. 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.

20. 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](http://lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources)), which include a learner leaflet; presentation templates; text, letter and document templates and posters. Stakeholders also receive a Skills Accounts e-bulletin each month to ensure that they are up to date on the trial's progress.

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

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

## **TRAINING AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE**

22. Will 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](mailto:skillscampaign@lsc.gov.uk) or 020 7413 3400.

23. Will there be a helpline for individuals?

Individuals will be able to access the services of the Careers Advice Service through its national helpline number – 0800 100 900. Individuals will be offered Skills Accounts as part of the Careers Advice Service offer.

A customer technical support line will be available to provide the first level of support, for example when a learner has forgotten their password.

Regional partners and stakeholders should contact their regional LSC Skills Accounts Team for advice/queries. See final page for contact details.

24. **What training on the Skills Accounts services/products has been available for stakeholder staff?**

Throughout the summer and autumn a series of workshops and seminars have taken place to inform stakeholders about the trials. Training is also available to assist **nextstep** advisers locally and the Careers Advice Service nationally, and learning providers' frontline staff.

## **THE ROLE OF FE COLLEGES**

25. **Do all colleges in the trial regions have to take part in the trials?**

We want all providers in the region to engage with Skills Accounts. Therefore all need to be aware that they may be presented with a Skills Voucher by learners who wish to study at their institution.

However in the trials, 20 providers in total (these are known as Strategic Partners) have worked with the LSC to develop this service and volunteered to register learners for a Skills Account from September 2008. There are 12 in the South East and 8 in the East Midlands. This is important because it allows us to test this key route into a Skills Account in a controlled way. Details of how this process will operate can be found in the Provider Guidelines.

During the first year of the trial all FE colleges within the trial areas could be presented with a Skills Voucher by learners who have already opened a Skills Account. Skills Vouchers should therefore be accepted through normal enrolment processes. Those learners that go to a college of their initiative will still need to be flagged as having a Skills Account in order that the LSC can evaluate the service. Further details concerning how this process will operate are currently being developed in conjunction with providers.

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

The National Learning Directory will be used to provide information for learners and so it is vital that all providers in the trial areas ensure that their course information is accurate and actively maintained on the National Learning Directory, 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](http://www.learning-directory.co.uk/pls/cgi-bin-data/page_pls_cp_login?s_type=LD).

Course Manager is the technical system within the NLD, which all providers need to use in order to update and maintain their course information. Course Manager is a tool designed for learning providers to expand and increase their marketing reach. It enables providers to add, update and archive courses online

quickly and easily and at a time that suits. Whenever information is updated in Course Manager, it is loaded into the National Learning Directory. By ensuring that this information is as complete as possible, learners will be able to accurately search for relevant courses offered by all providers, and not just those strategic partners involved in the trials.

More information is available from:

<http://www.advice-resources.co.uk/learningproviders/newproviders/cmhelp.pdf/>

"Advice resources" is also 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/>

27. [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 a learner who has opened a Skills Account and printed off their Skills Voucher.

A monthly e-bulletin will be sent to Strategic Partners & stakeholders to keep them informed about the trials, the first of these was sent out in July.

28. [What will the additional workload be? Will additional staff be required?](#)

With the Strategic Learning Partners, opening a Skills Account should be undertaken as part of the standard registration process. Therefore providers should not require any additional staff.

Other Learning Providers involved within the trial will be able to refer individuals on where and how to open a Skills Account as well as accepting Skills Vouchers from individuals who have already opened an account. They will not, however, for this phase of the trial open accounts on behalf of learners in the same way that the strategic partners will trial.

## **STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS**

29. [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 learners?](#)

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 DIUS 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 2008/09.

30. **What is the level of understanding and buy-in from the Strategic Partners/employees?**

Briefings to Strategic Partners have been taking place over the last few months. 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 being shared within the Strategic Partner's organisation.

### **BROADER INDIVIDUAL OFFER**

31. **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

32. **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 fully operational by 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.

33. **Will the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) system be ready for the two different types of trial? Will customers be able to use the internet service throughout the trial period?**

MIAP will produce Unique Learning Numbers (ULNs) for Skills Accounts customers for the purposes of the 2008/09 trials. The plan is to produce and issue a batch of ULNs on a regular basis during the trials so that all new holders of a Skills Account can access the full range of services.

### **DATA PROTECTION**

34. **What steps are taken to protect my data?**

The Learning and Skills Council and DIUS 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**

### **35. 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 stick 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.

DIUS 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 could be used to assess if the strategic benefits are being delivered, divided into two categories:
  - Shorter term indicators, which could be used to evaluate both the 08/09 trials and the fully rolled-out product and,
  - Longer term indicators, which could be used to evaluate 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 stick with their chosen courses and achieve better results
- Will be more informed and demanding customers, able to drive a demand-led system that is responsive to their needs

##### Providers

- Will be more responsive to learner needs and demands
- Will experience greater efficiency in their learner identification and registration services and eligibility tests through the use of MIAP systems

### Employers

- Will see the motivational value of training in their employees and will be willing to train more
- Will be more motivated to offer Apprenticeships through greater awareness of government funding available for an apprentice
- Will experience greater efficiency in the recruitment process as, thanks to the MIAP systems, they no longer have to spend time verifying an individual's qualifications

### aacs and Jobcentre Plus

- 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 Account 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
- 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 and JCP

#### 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 learners' demand, in the format that learners demand
- New providers enter the market
- Increase in amounts invested by employers in training
- Increased amount of apprenticeships offered by employers

36. 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

Careers information and advice services – Currently provided by

**nextstep** & the Careers Advice Service (CAS)

IES – Integrated Employment & Skills

aacs – Adult Advancement and Careers Service

MIAP – Managing Information Across Partners

ILA – Individual Learning Accounts

ALA – Adult Learner Accounts

Universal Trials – offer available to all adults

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