



# Aligning expectations

## *What the 2008/09 Skills Accounts trials will deliver*

25 July 2007

This factual brief seeks to help align expectations on what the trials in 2008/09 will deliver and is aimed at Regional LSC offices, stakeholders and providers.

Complementing this factual brief is a communications brief, which includes key messages and FAQs developed by the LSC and is available from Dymphna McGee.

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## OVERVIEW

Universal Skills Accounts trials will begin in September 2008 in the South East and East Midlands regions, building on the trials of Adult Learner Accounts which were also trialled in these regions. The focus of the Skills Accounts trials will be on building and testing the core products and support services. The key success factor is to ensure a quality service and an experience that works for learners and providers and which in turn has a positive impact on both learner motivation and provider responsiveness. In year one (academic year 08/09) we will focus on product development and testing systems, but we will progress to a phased introduction of Skills Accounts across England in year two (academic year 09/10), with full national roll-out beginning in 2010. We expect Skills Accounts to be fully rolled out by 2015.

## PRODUCT

During year one in the East Midlands and South East trials, learners who open a Skills Account will receive:

- Welcome materials detailing the benefits of a Skills Account and how to access further careers advice and support – they will have the option of receiving this by e-mail or hard copy;
- A Unique Learner Number (ULN), assigned by the MIAP Learner Registration Service, will provide access to the MIAP Learner Record, this will be automatically updated to include details of the learners qualifications;
- A virtual 'voucher' which may outline the value of state funding available to support a course. The value on the voucher will vary to reflect the learner's personal circumstances and choice of course. It will include an indication of whether the individual may be eligible for support and /or full fee remission. The individual can then present this to an accredited learning provider of their choice, who will then take them through the normal enrolment processes. The purpose of the 'voucher' is to encourage potential learners to take the next step and sign up for a course. A voucher does not however guarantee a place on a course, as this it may already be fully booked or the provider and individual may subsequently agree that another course is more appropriate. It is also important to note that eligibility checks on the Skill Accounts whilst robust are light touch and therefore cannot replace the need for providers to confirm a learner's personal details.
- During the first year, an individual's Skills Account will also record the actual value of the learning undertaken, including details of public and personal investment in the form of a statement;
- Access to an online personal Skills Account through which they can access a range of careers advice and support services. Skills Account holders will also be entitled to follow-up support from careers advice services.

## ROUTES

Skills Accounts can benefit learners whatever stage they are in their learning journey. Skills Accounts are designed to breakdown barriers to learning as a result it is important that learners can open a Skills Accounts through a number of routes. We are testing all of these routes during the 08/09 trials. However, to ensure that we are delivering the high quality experience learners expect we will make each route available in a controlled way between September and January. LSC regions are currently confirming the exact staging with their regional partners, but these routes will include:

- [The careers advice services \(currently provided by nextstep providers & learndirect national advice service\)](#) - Organisations who were recently awarded contracts to deliver careers advice services will participate in the South East and East Midlands will participate in the

trials. The learndirect national advice line will also be able to offer Skills Accounts to learners, building its experience of Adult learner Accounts (ALAs).

- **Training providers** – LSC regions have been working with ‘strategic partners’ who have volunteered to help develop and roll-out Skills Accounts within their region. Currently there are 12 in the South East and 8 in the East Midlands. These providers will offer Skills Accounts to eligible adults at the time of enrolment. Other providers will be brought on board in a phased approach over the following months. Vouchers will only be issued once we are confident that all delivery partners are properly prepared to issue vouchers and receive learners who have obtained a voucher. Initially we will only be asking ‘strategic partners’ to open Skills Accounts. However, all other learning providers in scope for Skills Account provision will benefit from having their courses promoted to learners, as a consequence they may be approached by learners with ‘vouchers’ wishing to enrol on a course, however these learners will have already have had to have registered for a Skills Account in order to have obtained their ‘voucher’.
- **Online** – Learners in the trial regions will have the facility to open a Skills Account online and for the first time be able to establish their likely eligibility for funding support. They will also be able to download a ‘voucher’.
- **Apprenticeships** – We will also begin to introduce the new Apprenticeship credit via a Skills Account, this will enable learners to access an Apprenticeship via the online and careers advisory services, or through the new Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching Service. Details of this service will shortly be available.

## **PHASED IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH**

For the 2008/09 trials there will be an incremental scaling up in each of the regions that will come on board in the timescales detailed below:

### East Midlands

- September 2008 – 8 strategic partners will be training, trialling and testing the systems for registering learners for a Skills Account. During this phase (Sept –Dec) we anticipate that relatively small numbers of learners may be registered, but we will be better able to make this assessment once we held detailed discussions with individual providers. By January we will expect a significant proportion of all new learners in-scope for adult learner responsive funding to be offered and registered for Skills Account.

Then on an area basis the advice services:

- October 2008 Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire
- November 2008 Lincolnshire and Rutland, Northamptonshire

Following the launch of the Skills Account online portal, all other regional FE providers offering Adult Learner Responsive Provision will be expected to receive individuals who have opened Skills Accounts; however, they will not be expected to open Skills Accounts for individuals themselves.

### South East

Similar arrangements will apply in the South East

- September – 10 strategic partners + 2 private providers

Then on an area basis all other providers offering adult responsive provision, plus the advice services

- October - Hampshire & Isle of Wight
- November – Thames Valley
- January – Sussex and Surrey
- February – Kent

### **PROJECTED LEARNER NUMBERS**

Our priority for the trials is to deliver a high quality service to learners. But we do need sufficient volumes of learners to take-up Accounts to allow us to thoroughly test the systems. So whilst our expectations around volumes are relatively modest, we will be encouraging all partners to actively promote and facilitate the use of Skills Accounts. The volumes below represent projections of the number of learners accessing Adult Learner Responsive funded provision who could be offered a Skills Account by a strategic partner:

- South East – 23,046<sup>1</sup>
- East Midlands – 9,400 from Strategic Partner route January 09 to July 09.

The second set of projections represent the number of learners accessing face-to-face careers advice sessions who believe could be offered a Skills Account:

- South East – 16,777
- East Midlands – 8,250<sup>2</sup> of which it is estimate 10% will progress into LSC funded provision

These figures are not targets. As previously stated above, all these trials will focus on the building and testing of a quality service and the figures are purely intended to provide an indication of the volumes of learners who we would expect to open a Skills Account. In addition we estimated that a maximum of 40,000 learners may register for a Skills Account either with the national advice services or online, but as with any advice service we not expect all of these individuals to immediate sign up for an eligible course or qualification.

### **BUILDING ON ALAs WITH A MORE AMBITIOUS SKILLS ACCOUNT OFFER**

Skills Accounts will be a universal service through which learning provision can be accessed at all levels, unlike ALAs which were only available for full Level 3 programmes. In the longer term, Skills Accounts will be the way through which an individual will be able to access their entitlements to publicly funded support. Skills Accounts will also be available to Jobcentre Plus customers to support their journey towards sustainable employment.

The Skills Account service is also broader and more ambitious than that offered through ALAs. As a consequence we expect that it will motivate more adults to take up learning. In particular, there is much greater emphasis on purchasing power and empowering individual's to exercise real choice. We will achieve this by providing an indication of the value of their funding entitlement through a personalised "voucher" before they enrol on a particular course.

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<sup>1</sup> The figures for the SE are based on 2006/07 data for participating strategic providers taking 25% of September, 50% of October and 100% from November – July of learners accessing provision from FLT to L3.

<sup>2</sup> These figures are based on 2006/07 data with an expectation in 2008/09 25% of all IAG intervention lead to a Skills Account being opened for an individual. Profiles are currently being developed with Regional Contractors for the service.

For ALAs this information was only available after the learner had started their course. In addition, Skills Accounts will provide access to the MIAP learner record. Over time we will add more services to the Skills Account system such as an online CV function and the ability to promote learning and the advice services directly to learners with an Account. We will also increasingly seek to integrate Skills Accounts services with other parts of the customer facing services such as the Skills Health Check, the Apprenticeship Service and Train to Gain.

The evaluation of ALAs is ongoing as we track learners overtime, however we have already taken on board some key lessons from the ALAs trials. For providers, a key difference will be that Skills Accounts will not involve the burden of double data entry onto the LAMS system which was a requirement of the ALA trials. Furthermore, in contrast to the target focus of the ALA trials, we are clear that any projected learner volumes are driven by the need to test any systems with sufficient volumes to ensure they are robust.

Finally, early ALA findings suggest that there is a particular need to communicate a common understanding of the benefits of the Skills Account to the individual, so that stakeholders and providers are fully equipped to support the service and help sell the offer to the individual. This will apply in particular to those adults who will have enrolled directly with a participating provider and for whom the real benefits of a Skills Account will come from having access to ongoing advice and support to continue in learning and to progress.