

New Developments In Government Support For Skills Training And Benefits

We think all Social Firms will have an interest in the Government's latest policy announcement "Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work" which heralds a new range of steps aimed at enabling people to get into work and then to develop their skills at work. Changes are to be made to rules on incapacity benefit and eligibility for Pathways to Work, and the "Train to Gain" funding available for employers is to be extended.

Full details have yet to be announced, but highlights include:

- For employers, funding for "Train to Gain" will be expanded from £440m to £1.1m by 2010, it will be made more flexible and extended to the voluntary sector, and will also be available for training by employers making pre-release job offers to offenders.
- A legal right for adults to training for basic and intermediate skills and qualifications will be set out in the Education and Skills Bill, which is scheduled for debate in this parliamentary session.
- A commitment to ensure that people on incapacity benefits are better off in work even after reasonable transport costs.
- Mandatory "skills health check" for people entering and remaining on Employment and Support Allowance (the allowance being introduced from October 2008 for people who would have previously been eligible for incapacity benefit)
- A commitment to test out improved support for people with mental health problems seeking work
- Opening eligibility for Pathways to Work to people under 25
- Removing the "16 hour rule" in Housing Benefit for short term recipients of incapacity benefit
- Targeting public investment in the Foundation Learning Tier, Skills for Life (Literacy, numeracy and ESL) and Level 2 training provision on people on benefits or seeking work.
- New "Skills Accounts" will be available to people in or out of work, offering a "virtual voucher of state funding" to purchase relevant learning at an accredited, quality assured provider of their choice.
- A range of support for lone parents

If you want to read the whole document (30 pages) the link is <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/making-skills-work.pdf>