

SKILLED TO GO

CONSUMER EDUCATION 2011-12

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper outlines the Office of Fair Trading's (OFT) approach to consumer education in fiscal year 2011-12. It gives a background to the Skilled to go toolkit, overview of recent research and outlines our proposed developments for the toolkit in 2011-12.
- 1.2 Skilled to go is an online educational resource for further education teachers, Scottish secondary schools and local authority Trading Standards Services (TSS). The toolkit uses everyday consumer situations, such as choosing a mobile phone or writing a letter of complaint, as contexts for learning numeracy and literacy. Teachers can download free resources and adapt them to suit the needs of their learners.¹ Skilled to go is designed to build consumer skills and knowledge. This supports the OFT's goal to create more active and informed consumers.

Background

Development of the toolkit

- 1.3 In July 2004, the OFT consulted upon their consumer education strategy². An outcome of this strategy was the development of Skilled to go. Launched in June 2008, the toolkit was updated in November 2009 and March 2011, to ensure content remained accurate.
- 1.4 Developed with LLU + at London South Bank University, the toolkit initially contained three modules on Buying and Selling, Technology, and Utilities. Two new modules, Scams, and Buying and Running a Car, were added in July 2010.³
- 1.5 In 2010, selected modules were made available to two additional audiences:
- Buying and Selling and Scams for TSS who deliver talks in schools and within the community

¹ See www.offt.gov.uk/skilledtogo

² See *OFT Consumer education strategy for 'Skilled to go' in 2010-11* for further detail

³ See *OFT Consumer education strategy for 'Skilled to go' in 2010-11* for further detail

- Buying and Selling, Technology, and Utilities for use by Scottish secondary teachers.⁴

Promotion of the toolkit

1.6 During 2010, Skilled to go was promoted at launch events and relevant conferences. Twenty four free workshops were held to train teachers across the UK in how to access and use the toolkit, reaching over 300 teachers. Ninety eight per cent of workshop attendees said the content of Skilled to go was relevant to the learners they worked with and the same percentage also intended to use Skilled to go with their learners in future.⁵ We know from our research that the most common way for teachers to hear about Skilled to go is through colleagues or managers. The second most common way is through referral websites.

Use of the toolkit

1.7 Skilled to go extended its reach across all audiences in all parts of the UK in 2010-11. At the end of March 2011, Skilled to go had 7,495 registered users, a 29 per cent increase on the previous year.

1.8 Looking more closely at users:

- 5,275 users have registered their interest as adult education and 58 per cent of all further education institutions⁶ in the UK have at least one staff member registered to access the materials
- 60 per cent of Scottish local authority secondary schools⁷ and 63 per cent of local authorities education services in Scotland have at least one registered user
- 60 per cent of all TSS across the UK have at least one registered user of Skilled to go.

⁴ See *OFT Consumer education strategy for 'Skilled to go' in 2010-11* for further detail

⁵ OFT internal analysis of evaluation forms completed by Skilled to go workshop attendees, April 2010 – March 2011

⁶ Figures produced using list of 2011 further education providers funded by Skills Funding Agency and Young People's Learning Agency (BIS)

⁷ Figures produced using list of 2010/11 Scottish secondary schools available on the Scottish Government website at www.scotland.gov.uk

2 RESEARCH

Evaluation of the financial benefits of Skilled to go

2.1 In April 2011, the OFT published a report on an evaluation of Skilled to go to assess return on investment.⁸ The report shows that (in adult and FE contexts alone, for only five specific benefit streams), Skilled to go could have directly benefited an estimated 13,277 consumers, helping them to make saving or gains, delivering £2,641,038 in consumer benefit. Against a total OFT investment of £551,525 during the same period, this means that Skilled to go has delivered a benefit to cost ratio of £4.79:1. The report highlights that Skilled to go has the potential to deliver far greater savings in the future – up to £13:1 if investment continues in 2014-15.

Research to improve usage of the toolkit

2.2 In March 2010, OFT conducted a two stage research project to build a picture of how teachers use Skilled to go in practice.⁹

2.3 There was widespread agreement across both research stages that Skilled to go is an excellent product. Teachers commented positively on the eye catching design, its flexibility, the high quality content and relevance of its objectives.

2.4 However, research identified three main areas for development:

- increasing awareness of Skilled to go resources
- improving website design and structure
- increasing use of range of resources amongst existing users.

2.5 In 2011-12, we will focus on maximising awareness of existing materials, improving the usability of the Skilled to go web pages and increasing usage of the current modules among users.

⁸ A full report, *Evaluating the financial benefits for consumers of consumer education and awareness campaigns Just tick it and Skilled to go*, is available as publication OFT 1323 from www.of.gov.uk

⁹ A full survey report, *Stage one: Researching the usage of the Skilled to go toolkit*, is available as publication OFT 1281 with supporting annexes OFT 1289, from www.of.gov.uk. A full research report, *Stage 2: Researching the usage of the Skilled to go toolkit and web pages*, is available as publication OFT 1310, with supporting annexes OFT 1311, from www.of.gov.uk

3 OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The strategic objective of Skilled to go is to develop consumer skills and knowledge so they feel empowered in consumer situations. For example, consumers will save money through shopping online, getting compensation through making a complaint etc.

Marketing objectives

- 3.2 To ensure that 65 per cent of further education institutions in the UK, and 64 per cent of Scottish secondary schools have at least one staff member registered to use Skilled to go.

- 3.3 Key Performance Indicators will be:

- to increase registrations on the Skilled to go website from 7,495 to 8,800 aiming for 75 per cent of these new registrations to be teachers in adult education
- to increase number of teachers claiming use materials from 43 per cent to 55 per cent.

4 TARGET AUDIENCES

- 4.1 The target audience for Skilled to go are:

- adult education teachers of literacy and numeracy in the UK
- ESOL teachers in the UK
- secondary school teachers in Scotland
- TSS staff who deliver decisions in schools
- trainee adult education teachers who will go on to deliver lessons to adults.

- 4.2 These teachers will reach people engaged in adult and further education learning on literacy, language and numeracy courses throughout the UK. This includes:

- young people aged 16-25 on vocational learning courses such as IT, car mechanics, child care and catering

- adults aged from 16-80 on vocational courses, return-to-employment training or studying voluntarily to improve their literacy or numeracy skills – many of whom are employed
- adults for whom English is not their first language who are resident, and often working, in the UK.

4.3 Secondary school students are an additional audience – particularly in Scotland where there is a specific, tailored toolkit for this age group – where teachers integrate the Skilled to go resources into their subject areas.

5 PLANNED ACTIVITIES

5.1 Since the launch of Skilled to go in 2008, a major priority for OFT has been content development. The focus for 2011-12 will be to raise awareness of Skilled to go and improve usage through improvements in accessibility. While expanding the current toolkits, either by introducing new modules or adapting existing ones for other audiences is not seen as a priority, we may add to the Technology module to ensure that important messages for consumers on protecting themselves whilst shopping online are included.

Website development

5.2 Teachers feel that the Skilled to go web pages are not easy to navigate, often word-heavy and lack the usability of other education websites. We will develop the Skilled to go web pages into a new format to:

- enable new users to register and access information easily
- help teachers understand what they will find within the site
- allow users to find what they need more easily
- help users to avoid clicking out of the Skilled to go web area and then having difficulty finding their way back
- present information in a way that is meaningful to teachers.

Repackaging of existing modules

- 5.3 Many Skilled to go users struggle to make use of the range of supporting material, such as delivery guidance in the Teachers' notes or curriculum references in the User guide. They are unsure what these documents contain and would prefer for all relevant material for a particular activity to be stored in a more user-friendly way.
- 5.4 The consumer education team will repackage content to combine an activity with its delivery guidance, curriculum references etc. This will make it easier for existing users to engage with a broader range of materials and encourage new users to understand and explore the resources more instinctively. The recently updated adult education toolkit will be the first to be repackaged.

Marketing activity

- 5.5 Publicity will include:
- Emails to existing users on the Skilled to go database to encourage them to use the materials more frequently and to pass on information to colleagues.
 - Coverage in appropriate educational websites, newsletters and publications. We know that referral websites are the second most popular way of people finding out about Skilled to go so this is an important channel.
 - Identifying opportunities via Associations of Colleges in Scotland, England and Wales to address workshops, conferences and e-newsletters and publicity opportunities in Northern Ireland via the Consumer Council. Workshops are the third most popular way to learn about Skilled to go. We will look to set up longer term relationships with certain adult education providers in the UK such as prisons and teacher training schools.
 - Continuing to deliver free workshops to teachers to train them in use of the Skilled to go resources and publicising any updates or changes.

- Direct mail to colleges and organisations to generate awareness of the materials.
- Developing relations with education organisations where we have delivered workshops and those with a high number of staff registrations to identify Skilled to go ambassadors to advocate on the value of the resources.
- Exploring the potential of social media tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, to increase interaction with teachers on Skilled to go and to further strengthen our network of relevant contacts and partners.
- To add to teachers' tools for cascading Skilled to go amongst colleagues with:
 - a downloadable Skilled to go poster for staff rooms and classrooms
 - a 'Tell a friend' option on the website, to quickly and practically forward the link to other teachers.

Developing partnerships

5.6 The OFT has established excellent partnerships with relevant organisations who support Skilled to go through their own communications. We aim to develop new links, for example with Department for Education or the Institute for Learning, to explore additional channels to promote Skilled to go.

Reviewing existing content

5.7 We have committed to reviewing content every 12 months as accuracy and topicality of the learning materials is integral to retaining teachers' support. Modules 1-3 of the adult education toolkit were updated in March 2010. This year these updates will be applied to relevant modules in the Scottish secondary and TSS toolkits. Modules 4 and 5 of the adult education toolkit are due to be reviewed and re-verified in 2011 to ensure content is accurate.

6 TIMELINE

- 6.1 Skilled to go is an ongoing consumer education programme. Our major project for the year – the update of the Skilled to go web pages and repackaging of content – will take place in the summer of 2011 to launch in conjunction with the start of the new academic year.
- 6.2 Projects which involve the review and update of existing materials will be staggered from September 2011 to January 2012.
- 6.3 Our annual online survey of users will launch in December 2011, seeking views on the newly designed web pages and repackaged materials.

Activity	Proposed date for action
Website redesign Website relaunch	Aug 2011 Sep 2011
PR through direct mailing/ telephone contact: - Local authority adult education services (pilot in London) - Teacher training providers offering Skills for Life courses	Jun 2011 Sep 2011
Review and update existing materials: - Scottish secondary modules on Buying and selling, Technology and Utilities (including repackaging work) - TSS modules on Buying and selling and Scams - Adult education modules on Scams and Buying and running a car	Sep 2011 Oct 2011 Jan 2012
Online survey activity to measure effectiveness of STG	Dec 2011
Engagement with relevant parties through: In-house events (or using free venues nationally) to publicise new website and repackaged materials Workshops and events at partner organisation events Campaigns update e-newsletter	Sep – Nov 2011 Ongoing Jun, Sep, Dec 2011, Mar 2012

7 BUDGET

7.1 The budget for Skilled to go activity is £76k.

8 EVALUATION

8.1 The impact of Skilled to go activities will be evaluated through:

- monitoring of new registrations on a monthly basis
- evaluation of the Skilled to go database for trends in regions, sector, how new users heard about the resources
- production of a bi-annual quantitative survey to registered users following website re-design, repackaging of materials and increased publicity to monitor response to updates
- gathering of qualitative opinion of resources and website improvements through workshop feedback, emails to database and face-to-face engagement at industry events.