

# Report

## Paper 11: Publication of timetable of returns and systems updates

Progress report

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| <b>Audience</b>           | The information authority board |
| <b>Publication intent</b> | PUBLIC DOCUMENT                 |

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## Background and introduction

- 1 At its meeting of 3 December 2008, *the information authority* board asked the secretariat to publicise the ILR returns timetable as well as expected guidance and systems updates such as the Learner Information Suite (LIS) and the Learning Aims Database (LAD). This would benefit training providers and software suppliers as it would help them plan their annual activities.
- 2 Therefore, the secretariat liaised with the Data Service and various teams in the LSC to populate the timetable. There was general concern about publicising these dates as previously these have not been made public. This is reflected in the LSC's business cycle where few definite dates are published - outcomes are listed in the expected month and often deadlines are moved to reflect slippage. The secretariat was informed that although there was an internal timetable, it was only used for monitoring purposes and was never made available externally.
- 3 This work was complicated by the Machinery of Government process. Teams and individuals were focused on transfer issues and were reluctant or unable at this time of change to commit to publishable dates.

## Purpose

- 4 The purpose of this report is to update the board on progress made so far, and to obtain agreement on a way forward with this strand of work.

# Key points and issues

## Current situation

- 5 Appendix A of the ILR specification outlines the return dates for ILR returns and these dates have been collated and have been published on *the information authority* website. The spreadsheet also includes details of *the information authority* board and Data Services Steering Group meetings.
- 6 The secretariat has been liaising with the Data Service to agree dates for LIS and LAD updates and has been informed that it will be difficult to do so due to other external pressures. The secretariat aims to work with the Data Service to identify and address these pressures and produce a timetable that includes systems updates in the future.
- 7 The MI Planning team in the LSC has a timetable for activities, including dates when LSC guidance is due, but this is used for internal purposes only and never published as a result of concerns that there would be slippage in the deadlines. As this is the final year of the LSC, it was felt that there was no benefit in pursuing the matter further, but to concentrate efforts on working with the new agencies.

## Benefits to the agencies

- 8 Although the benefits of publishing a timetable are clear for training providers and suppliers, there are also clear benefits for the agencies involved. In introducing clarity to the process, the agencies would benefit by:
  - a Getting data quality improvements built into the process
  - b Timely returns with fewer errors and therefore the need to use less resource to correct any problems
  - c Meeting their own data analysis commitments to other agencies and government departments
  - d Demonstrating their actions, and where delays are caused by external factors, being able to demonstrate corrective action
  - e Obtaining an annual cycle that can be used effectively for future planning.
- 9 Publishing a timetable of guidance and processes also indicates a willingness to be open to scrutiny by the systems that the agencies support.

## Proposed way forward

- 10 As the LSC is nearing its end, it would be sensible to engage with YPLA and SFA to agree to a timetable.
- 11 The YPLA has been engaging with *the information authority* and attending our advisory group meetings to present to training providers. At these sessions YPLA representatives have been positive about openness and transparency of processes, indicating that they would see the benefits of publishing a timetable of their activities.
- 12 As the SFA is not yet as defined as the YPLA, the opportunities to engage with them have been limited. However, when the opportunity arises, the

secretariat intends to include them in advisory group meetings as well as discuss the possibility of publishing a timetable.

- 13 One of the reasons the LSC has been hesitant in the past about publishing timetables is due to factors outside its control, such as awaiting departmental agreement. Any published timetable would take account of this and where the delay is caused by external factors, this will be indicated in the updated timetable. This will encourage these agencies to publish the timetable.

## **Implications for the FE and training system**

- 14 The FE and training system has not had clear dates when guidance and updates will be available and this has created difficulty for training providers and their software suppliers.
- 15 The YPLA, SFA and the Data Service have indicated that they are committed to clarity in the process for training providers. Early engagement and an understanding of their processes will enable the secretariat to work with these agencies and encourage clarity in the process and publication dates of expected updates and guidance.
- 16 Clarity and the ability to plan will greatly benefit training providers as they will be able to plan software changes and manage their resources more effectively. They have long asked for this level of information.
- 17 However to ensure that it is effective, the publication of the timetable will also need the commitment of the organisations involved and this can be achieved through early engagement. These organisations will also see the benefits of publicising these dates through:
  - a Better quality data which would be adequately tested before submission to the Data Service
  - b Less resources to handle enquiries about the delivery dates
  - c Planning cycles which are clearly outlined and open.

## **Recommendation**

- 18 The board is recommended to agree that the secretariat continues to publish a returns timetable on the website and populates it further as dates become agreed with the organisations replacing the LSC.
- 19 The board is recommended to agree that the secretariat does not attempt to finalise LSC dates and instead approaches the Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) about timetabling the guidance to providers to ensure providers and software suppliers are given adequate time to plan their activities.
- 20 The board is also recommended to agree that the secretariat will work with the Data Service to agree the LIS and LAD dates and publish these at least six months before they are due.

**Author** Selvy Kasparis  
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