



## ***The information authority***

Paper 12: *The information authority secretariat report*

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## **1. What are we asking the board to do?**

This paper gives a status update on the work of *the information authority* secretariat. Decisions are required on 3 items; the remainder of the paper is for information.

## **2. Introduction**

This status report covers work by the secretariat since the board meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2008 and that planned before the next meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008.

## **3. Decisions to be taken by the Board**

The following decisions are required:

- 3.1** The board had asked the secretariat to investigate the issue of surveys and whether some action should be taken to address these. The 'Data Burden' study did not show that surveys were a major issue in the sector. The LSC has also identified that QIA is sponsoring a piece of work on survey co-ordination across the agencies / departments in the FE system.

The secretariat proposes to support the QIA –sponsored initiative and review if further action is required on behalf of *the information authority* in early 2009

**The board is asked to support this approach.**

### **3.2 Extensible Markup Language**

Extensible markup language (XML) is a free open standard for documents. You can think of XML as a language that allows information about the meaning of documents to be stored in those same documents. Information systems that can read XML can then translate and act on that information.

The e-Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF) mandates the adoption of XML and the development of XML schemas as the cornerstone of the government interoperability and integration strategy. Already data about pupils in schools is collected using XML and data about learners in HE institutions will be collected in XML for 2007/08.

The secretariat initiated a study to scope the conversion of the individualised learner record (ILR) into an XML format. The study was in two parts resulting in two reports. The first looks at converting the ILR data definitions to XML and the second at collecting ILR data in an XML format. The reports have concluded that:

- it is technically feasible to publish the ILR specification in XML and collect ILR data in XML and identified how this could be done
- using XML to publish the ILR specification would make it clearer and easier for software suppliers to implement

- collecting ILR data in XML format would make software development easier and is becoming universal but that it would also increase the volume of data transferred considerably and could cause poorer performance of collection systems.

The secretariat is now working with the FE data service to assess the costs and timescale for implementation drawing on the experience of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in its similar implementation.

**The board is asked to note the work undertaken and confirm its support for the current work.**

### **3.4 Benefits monitoring - survey**

*The information authority* was a deliverable of the Further Education System Data project. In line with good practice, benefits monitoring will take place. One of the benefits is 'long term satisfaction with *the information authority*'. The secretariat would like to measure this with the minimum amount of impact on the sector. It is therefore proposed to measure this using a short questionnaire via board members' existing communication mechanisms.

**The board is asked to support and approve this activity.**

## **4. Progress**

### **Activities for last period (March to May 2008)**

#### **4.1 Stakeholder engagement**

Raising awareness of the ILR change process for 2009/10 and *the information authority* more generally, development of protocol with Single Voice/ gatekeeping groups, engagement on awarding body issues.

##### **Events held:**

- Introduction to MIAP / *The information authority* / Data Service workshops for regional AoC and ALP (commenced 27<sup>th</sup> February; complete 13<sup>th</sup> May) - 19 workshops involving 1100 providers

##### **Other events attended:**

- Capita conference – seminars by Pete Ashton and Una Bennett (30<sup>th</sup> April)
- ALP conference – seminar, 7<sup>th</sup> May

##### **Other meetings / contacts:**

- AoC (Sue Dutton) – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008
- Becta (Ann Hughes) – 7<sup>th</sup> April 2008
- LSC (Sue Reekie plus regular contacts)
- West Midlands Local Government Association - 8<sup>th</sup> April 2008
- DIUS regular contacts

- Self regulation/Single Voice - regular contacts
- Federation of Awarding Bodies (Paul Ellis) – 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2008
- Asset Skills, Sector Skills Council (Chris James) – 24<sup>th</sup> April 2008
- FE Data Theme Advisory Group – 28<sup>th</sup> April 2008
- OfQual (Isobel Nisbet/Sue McGlynn) - 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008
- LSC / HESA/ HEFCE – on data exchange – 6<sup>th</sup> May 2008
- Vocational Qualification reform – 6<sup>th</sup> May 2008
- Information Standards Board – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2008
- Various provider visits

### **Website**

- Feconnect – *the information authority's* web portal ([www.theia.communityserver.com](http://www.theia.communityserver.com)) went live in early April. The number of registered users continues to grow with currently around 90 members.

### **4.2 Secretariat team**

- The vacancy for Community & Stakeholder Manager has been filled. Anne Fessi will start on 14<sup>th</sup> July.
- A PA / administrator has been appointed.
- Secretariat processes have been documented. Resourcing gaps and implications for team structure are being assessed.

### **4.3 Quality and standards**

- Work has continued on support documentation for the 2008/09 ILR specification. Most documents are published except the support manuals and three other documents which all require the LSC to finalise its funding guidance for 2008/09.
- Work has commenced to make ILR data definitions consistent with the aligned data definitions approved by the Education, Skills and Children's Services Information Standards Board. The secretariat will shortly share with stakeholders the changes it proposes to implement in the 2009/10 ILR.
- The DCSF/ DIUS 'Raising Expectations' consultation document has been analysed for its impact on information in the FE system and a response drafted for agreement by the board
- The investigation into the differences in LSC / Ofsted success rates has concluded and is being presented at 4<sup>th</sup> June board meeting
- The study of data burden in the sector has finished. The findings are being presented at 4<sup>th</sup> June board meeting.
- The historic agreement between HESA / HEFCE and the LSC on exchange of data on FE provision in Higher Education Institutions and vice versa is no longer working effectively. *The information authority* facilitated a meeting of the stakeholders (including DIUS) to discuss the issues and agree a way forward. This was very constructive and work is now in progress.
- Discussions have been held with the LSC about more certainty for providers in the funding planning cycle.
- Input to Framework for Excellence documentation e.g. on clarity

- Advice to LLUK on data standards

#### **4.4 Governance**

- Input has been provided to the LSC and DIUS on potential governance arrangements for the Data Service. These have not been finalised. It is expected that the chairman of *the information authority* will be part of the strategic governance of the Data Service, while the secretariat would be represented at the operational / implementation level.
- *The information authority* will define the standards to which the Data Service will work. Work is ongoing on defining change management arrangements.

#### **4.5 Budget**

- The final financial outcome for 2007/08 spend was in line with forecast. A summary of this, and current year's spend is attached at Appendix A.

#### **4.6 Work in progress**

- The key risks and issues for *the information authority's* work are listed at Appendix B. A current view of work in progress is attached at Appendix C. Good progress has been made in the last quarter on initiatives in relation to the ILR.
- Work is being aligned with the Bureaucracy Reduction Group to avoid duplication of effort

### **Activities planned for next period (June to September 2008)**

#### **4.7 Stakeholder engagement**

- An annual report for *the information authority* will be prepared and published.
- Conferences – AoC CIS (25<sup>th</sup> June), LGA (1-3 July)
- Data Service launch – 6<sup>th</sup> June
- ISB launch – 26<sup>th</sup> June
- Wider promotion and use of the web portal
- Engagement on ILR change requests for 2009/10 including bi-lateral discussions, use of the web portal, working group sessions with providers and software suppliers
- Work with various groups on initiatives such as the National Apprenticeships Service, Skills Accounts, Integrated Employment Service collections to identify need for *information authority* clearance and / or support

#### **4.8 Secretariat team**

- Following agreement by the chairman, recruitment will commence to fill gaps in team.

#### **4.9 Quality and Standards**

- Work with the LSC to encourage the setting of a published business cycle timetable to give more certainty for providers

- Standards advice and support will be provided to initiatives such as the National Apprenticeships Vacancy Matching Service
- Improving the ILR specification by:
  - reviewing data definitions and where these can be expressed more clearly doing so
  - identifying how each field is used in reporting and calculations and assigning ownership, and sub-ownership, of each field to a stakeholder
  - assigning a data quality standard to ILR fields
- Providing technically advice on requests for change to the ILR specification for 2008/09 including identifying options and assessing their relative merits
- Providing advice on use of the ILR paper forms and seeking to reduce the bureaucracy associated with the way that they are implemented
- Carrying out an impact analysis and planning the use of XML in conjunction with the data service.

#### **4.10 Governance**

- Work will continue on developing governance arrangements and working practices between *the information authority* and the Data Service

#### **4.11 Budget**

- Work is ongoing to define and cost specific projects for completion in 2008/09. Specifically, this will include the taking forward of recommendations from the studies on data burden and LSC / Ofsted success rate differences.

### **5. FE Sector Implications**

As directed by the board, the secretariat will continue to focus most of its resource on changes related to learner data in 2008. Scrutiny will continue of other key information related initiatives.

### **6. Contact Details**

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**Appendix A**

**Financials - 2007/08**

Cost item	Budget 2007/8 (000's)	Actual spend for 2007/8 (including accruals)	Total under spend
<b>Revenue</b>			
Staffing		455	
Permanent Staff			
Recruitment Costs			
Contract Staff/Consultants			
Expenses			
<b>Staffing Total</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>-311</b>
Marketing/Communication	100	63	
Communications and marketing			
Misc. Supplies			
Team Days/Events			
IA Board Meetings	4		
<b>Marketing Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>-41</b>
Projects			
XML Project	30	27	
Data Service Support			
Workplan Project	50		
<b>Projects/Support Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>-53</b>
<b>Revenue Total</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>-405</b>
<b>Capital</b>			
Buildings and Services			
IA Portal Development	250	1	
IA Portal Service and Support			
<b>Capital Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-249</b>
<b>Total Budget/Costs</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>-654</b>

**Financials - 2008/09**

Cost item	Forecast Budget 2008/9 (000's)	Forecast April	Forecast May	Forecast June	Total Forecast for Qtr 1
<b>REVENUE</b>					
<b>Staff Costs</b>					
Permanent Staff (previously LSC)	75	6	6	6	18
Permanent Staff (New)	433	21	21	21	63
Contractors/Temporary Staff	80	6	10	10	26
Recruitment costs	25				0
Training Costs/Travel and conference	30	1	1	7	9
<b>Total staff costs</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Marketing</b>	100				
Comms Consultancy		1	1	2	4
Stakeholder Events - MIAP				15	15
					0
<b>Information Authority Board</b>	8	0	0	2	2
					0
					0
<b>Projects</b>	499		3	3	6
<b>Revenue Total</b>	<b>1,250</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>CAPITAL</b>					
Buildings and Services					
Existing Staff (from LSC)	33	3	3	3	9
New staff	132	11	11	11	33
IA Portal Development	50				0
IA Portal Service and Support	35				0
<b>Capital Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>1,500</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>185</b>

## Appendix B

### Risks and issues

#### Issues

No.	Issue	Action
01	Machinery of Government - need to assess how this might affect <i>the information authority</i> in future.	UB / GJ to continue input to MoG consultation, and to react accordingly. Paper presented to board for discussion to determine formal <i>information authority</i> response and how to take forward during the next few months.
02	<i>The information authority</i> needs to determine how it will engage with local authorities in the future, as a result of MoG and the changes to FE funding	LGA board representative to provide advice and support. Existing DIUS / DCSF links with LAs to be investigated.
03	There are a number of resource gaps within <i>the information authority</i> . This is having an impact on the ability to deliver the work plan for 2008/9.	Resource and skill requirements being established. The information authority needs to determine its long term structure requirements to enable it to become fully effective.
04	There is a requirement to engage with other initiatives such as Skills Accounts, National Apprenticeship Service, 14-19 Diplomas etc.	Discussions have already taken place with Skills Accounts, who have requested attendance at a future board to present their information requirements. In addition, they are being invited to present at the workshops scheduled for July. Further updates will be provided to the Board as and when appropriate.

#### Key Risks

No	Risk Description and Impact	Mitigating Actions
01	There may be too much confusion between FESD, Data Service and the <i>information authority</i> . This could result in a duplication of effort, an inconsistent approach being adopted and reduced confidence amongst the stakeholder community.	Develop and communicate a set of clearly defined roles and ensure that relationships between the three are proactively managed. The Communications Team will produce an additional article explaining how they all fit together, for inclusion on each of the websites.
02	Stakeholder data users and FE System circumvent <i>information authority</i> decisions or do not come to <i>the information authority</i> for changes in information.	Continue with the programme of work to engage with stakeholders. Maintain relationships and interaction through the Community Website, Stakeholder events and ongoing communication activities
03	There is a risk that Data Standards are not agreed, resulting in the continuing mismatch of data requirements. A current example under review is ethnicity codes.	This could be agreed bilaterally or alternatively, via the Information Standards Board.
04	The future demands on <i>the information authority</i> from the Data Service may be such that <i>the information authority</i> may not be able to manage through the lack of resources.	The DS Governance structure will include representation from <i>the information authority</i> and Graham Jones will be sitting on the DS Board.

**Appendix C Workplan (in progress items only)**

Work Plan Reference	Deliverable/Activity	Status	Target Date
	<b>4.1 Analyse Data Burden</b>		
4.1.1	Assess extent of data burden, its causes and options to reduce it	In progress	04/06/2008
	<b>4.2 Data Collection and Analysis</b>		
4.2.2	Change Request Process - Produce Generic list for other Non ILR data collections - (Phase 2)	In progress	15/06/2008
4.2.3	Rationalisation of data duplication - Priority FE Data in order to ensure that the collection of duplicate and low value data is eliminated. (Phase 1 - ILR)	In progress	01/09/2008
4.2.4	Manage the ILR Specification and Change Process	In progress	30/11/2008
	<b>4.3 Set Data Standards</b>		
4.3.1	Define common data standards for FE Data to allow different agencies to work effectively together (Phase 1 - ILR - Pilot)	In progress	16/05/2008
4.3.3	Align schools, FE and HE Data definitions and standards.	In progress	01/09/2008
4.3.4	Resolve discrepancies /confusion between LSC/Ofsted reporting	In progress	04/06/2008
	<b>4.5 Communication Workstreams</b>		
4.5.3	Stakeholder engagement to identify and build consensus on opportunities for improvements in FE Data Management	In progress	Ongoing
	<b>4.6 Performance management of the information authority secretariat</b>		
4.6.1	Benefits and Performance Management Monitoring and reporting in place	In progress	Ongoing
4.6.3	Manage Stakeholder Perceptions	In progress	15/07/2008
	<b>4.7 Electronic Signatures</b>		
4.7.1	Scope the short/medium/term solutions to recording and maintaining ILR information and individual signatures. (For example, scanning in of ILR and electronic signatures)	In progress	30/06/2008
	<b>4.8 FE surveys</b>		
4.8.1	Scope the future governance/authority processes for the development and distribution of Further Education Surveys	In progress	04/06/2008
	<b>4.9 Engagement with FE Initiatives - ILR changes or new amended collections</b>		
4.9.1	Skills Accounts	In progress	
4.9.2	National Apprenticeship Service	In progress	
4.9.3	14-19 Diplomas	In progress	
4.9.4	NES	In progress	
4.9.5	QCF	In progress	
4.9.6	DWP/Job Centre Plus	In progress	
4.9.7	Train to Gain	In progress	
	<b>4.10 Awarding Body</b>		
4.10.1	Awarding Body Issues	Scoping	
	<b>4.11 Data Transformation</b>		
	<b>4.12 Data inconsistencies</b>		
4.11.2	Data inconsistencies with ISB	In progress	