

The information authority secretariat report

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 two items; the remainder of the paper is for information.

2. Introduction

This status report covers work by the secretariat since the board meeting on 4 March 2009 and that planned before the next meeting on 30 September 2009.

3. Decisions to be taken / items to be noted by the board

The following decisions are required:

3.1 Protocol and terms of reference

The information authority board is asked to provide feedback on and agree a revised version of the protocol and terms of reference. (The documents are at Appendix B with highlighted changes). The main change is to give more detail on the types of data in which the authority will take an interest. The documents have been reviewed to ensure they support the authority's role in the light of the Machinery of Government changes.

The board is asked to agree the proposed changes to the terms of reference and protocol for *the information authority*.

3.2 Data quality – case studies

As part of making improvements to data quality, the secretariat is asking for case studies from providers to drive up overall data quality. Recognising that MI staff are a valuable resource, *the information authority* is proposing to make a small payment (£250 maximum for reimbursement of expenditure) to the provider for good quality case studies. The board is asked to approve such payments. The total amount expected to be spent is (£2,500).

The board is asked to confirm that it is content with payments being made of up to £250 to individual providers for good quality case studies on data quality improvements.

Points for noting:

3.3 Chairman of *the information authority*

DIUS has extended Graham Jones' term as chairman of *the information authority* board for a further year.

3.4 Data Service steering group

Ian Pryce (who is also a member of *the information authority* board) has been appointed as the chair of the Data Service Steering Group.

The last meeting of the Data Service Steering Group was held on 15 May 2009. Items discussed were:

- Methods for delivering provider training
- Data Service blueprint – project update from Capgemini on establishing the Data Service vision
- Data Service update - ILR data quality, MI reports, success rates, service desk roll out, projects update
- Communications – identifying the best way forward for communicating with providers
- Data Service and MoG update

3.5 ILR review

The secretariat is undertaking a review of the ILR for DIUS to see how it is meeting the needs of the department. Findings are expected to be shared with the board before the next meeting.

3.6 Timetable for ILR data collections

The secretariat is developing in connection with the Data Service a timetable for ILR data collections, which shortens collection windows and where possible eliminates 'data freezes'. The timetable is expected to be presented to the board at the next meeting.

3.7 Information authority spend

The spend against budget for 2008/09 and the current and forecast spend for 2009/10 are attached (Appendices C and D). In line with previous forecasts, the spend for 2008/09 was under budget by £374k primarily due to slower recruitment of staff. As recruitment is now almost complete, such an under spend is not expected to occur in 2009/10.

4. Further information

The appendices to this report include:

- Progress report and key activities for the period March 2009 – September 2009 (Appendix A)
- Revised protocol and terms of reference for *the information authority* (Appendix B)
- Financial performance for 2008/09 (Appendix C)
- Financial forecast for 2009/10 (Appendix D)
- Risks and issues (Appendix E)

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Appendix A

Progress report

Activities for last period (March-May 2009)

1. Stakeholder engagement

Events held:

In addition to our usual advisory group meetings we also held the first meeting of our new Data Users group, for key users of further education data. Organisations invited included the LSC, DIUS, DCSF, DWP, JCP, Connexions, HEFCE and Ofsted. The meeting was very successful with many useful issues discussed and raised.

Other meetings / contacts:

- The authority exhibited at the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association conference (30 March – 1 April)
- Graham Jones presented at AoC Principals' meetings in South West (18 March), East Midlands (2 April), Eastern (21 May)
- Graham Jones and Una Bennett met with Jon Collis, ALP (13 March)
- Information Standards Board (ISB) (24 March)
- Qualifications Reform & Delivery England Board (1 April)
- Fiona Pethick, Ofqual (22 April)
- Graham Jones and Una Bennett met with Bob Powell, HOLEX (24 April)
- NW CMIS group (24 April)
- Presentations at Capita MIS conference on 28 April
- Presentation to the LSC's External Advisory Group (11 May)
- Workshops at ALP conference (13 May)
- Presentation to DIUS staff, London (18 May)
- Better Regulation Executive on contribution to DIUS Simplification Plan (19 May)
- DIUS regular contacts
- Success rates harmonisation group – monthly meetings
- LLUK – regular contact
- LSC – regular contacts
- Data Service – regular contacts including Steering Group
- Fact-finding meetings with Local Authority colleagues in Coventry, Warwickshire and Birmingham.

Website and community portal

Use and functionality of both sites continues to improve.

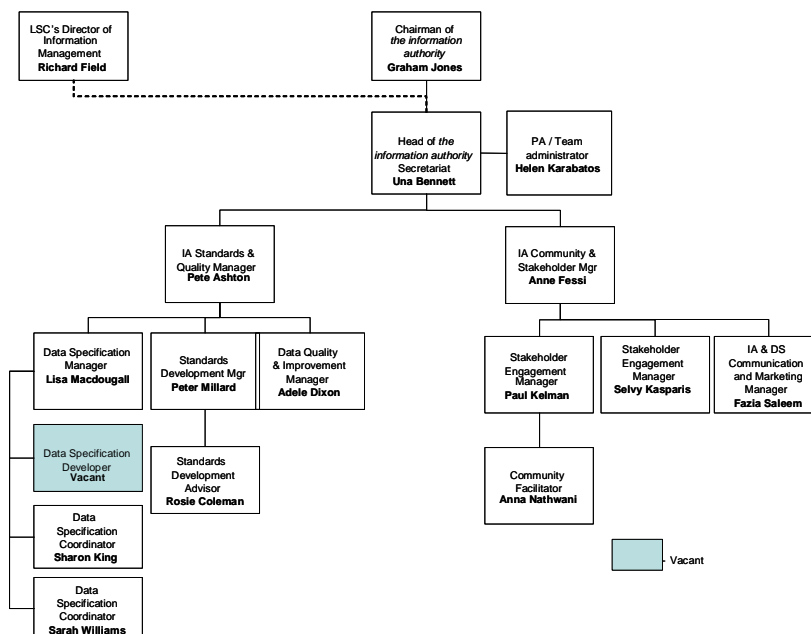
- 1,908 average unique visitors per month to www.theia.org.uk per month.
- The corporate site now has a 'web alerts' function so that users can receive e-mails when relevant information is published.

- 337 users have contributed to 610 threads and 689 posts on the **feconnect** site.
- **Feconnect** has recently hosted a 'hot seat' with Graham Jones as our first expert, answering queries from colleagues in the education sector.

2. Secretariat team

- Good progress has been made with the filling of the approved new posts for the secretariat. The following have started work with *the information authority*:
 - Anna Nathwani, Community Facilitator
 - Selvy Kasparis, Stakeholder Engagement Manager
 - Peter Millard, Standards Development Manager
 - Adele Dixon, Data Quality and Improvement Manager
- An up-to-date version of the secretariat's structure chart is detailed below.
- Contract resource continues to be deployed to supplement the permanent team pending recruitment of new staff, specifically on the ILR 2009/10 Data Quality Project.
- As part of the Machinery of Government changes, it has been confirmed that the secretariat team will be hosted within the Shared Services function of the Skills Funding Agency.

The information authority – structure chart June 2009



3. Quality and standards

- The ILR 2009/10 Data Quality Project has been endorsed by the project board and key deliverables are being progressed with colleagues within *the information authority*, the LSC and the Data Service. A paper outlining the activities is being presented to the board at this meeting.
- Work is completed on investigating the earlier reporting of achievement data and a report is included to this board meeting.
- The team has supported the development of a data standard for ethnicity now approved by the Information Standards Board (ISB) for education, skills and children's services. This work was initiated by *the information authority* and funded by it.

4. Governance and Planning

- The secretariat commenced a review of its workplan for 2009/10 and key work stream leads are prioritising their activities, identifying required resource and determining how any gaps in resource/skills can be managed. A full update is due to board members in September.

5. Budget

- Final spend for the financial year 2008/9 is detailed at Appendix D. There was an underspend of £374k, resulting from lower than expected staff costs, reduced marketing costs and slower than expected run rate on project costs.
- The budget for this financial year (2009/10) is set out in Appendix E. The revenue budget for 2009/10 is £1.2m and capital budget £80k.

Activities planned for next period (June – September 2009)

7. Stakeholder engagement

- Main sponsor of the AoC Nilta CIS conference on 25 June 2009.
- The LGA Conference is due to take place 30 June through to 2 July; *the information authority* will be exhibiting at this event.
- Meetings with our existing advisory groups are being held throughout June and the first meeting of our new advisory group for Local Authority colleagues is being held on 25 July.
- We are exhibiting at the 14-19 Reform Conference, London on 2 July.
- We are presenting to PICs (Providers' Integrated Claim System) Users' Group.
- Meeting with LSC colleagues and Kent and Medway LSC to discuss their work to engaging local authorities in a MoG Transition Group.
- Consultation with data providers and users on proposed changes to the ILR for 2010/11.

8. Secretariat team

- There is one outstanding post (Data Specification Developer) which is hoped to be filled by the end of June 2009.

- A team training day is being organised for July 2009 to support team building following the recruitment of a number of new staff.

9. Quality and Standards

- Standards advice and support will continue to be provided to various FE initiatives including to LLUK on workforce data collection.
- Continued contribution to working groups of the Information Standards Board.
- The secretariat is currently working with Connexions on agreeing a standard data set for their collections.
- Work is currently underway to determine the feasibility of providing a comprehensive set of timetables to enable providers to complete their planning processes more efficiently and effectively. The secretariat is continuing with its engagement with the relevant departments to determine if and how this could be achieved. The planned target date for having an agreed timetable in place is October 2009.
- The team will be evaluating and consulting about requests to change the ILR and preparing a paper on the specification for 2010/11 for the next board meeting. A request to collect earlier learner data at the first learner responsive data collection has been received from DCSF. Other changes being considered include:
 - implementing the ILR collection in XML format
 - implementing extended character sets so that all European languages are supported
 - bringing return dates for adult safeguarded learning returns in line with those for learner responsive
 - shortening the time in which learner responsive returns can be made.

10. Governance

- Work continues on embedding governance arrangements and working practices between *the information authority* and the Data Service.

Appendix B – Revised *information authority* protocol and terms of reference

Protocol

A protocol agreement signed by stakeholder organisations gives the board the authority to deliver reforms to further education data.

The Protocol - its development and stages

1. By signing this protocol, we are committing to the FE data reform objectives and to working together to deliver them.
2. We support the development of data, collection and reporting standards across the FE system and we support the development of a process for agreeing those standards. **The scope of these standards includes, but is not limited to:**
 - **Data relating to learners, learning participation, achievements and staff in the FE sector, qualifications and awards.**
 - **Definitions and metadata related to data collected, data derived from collected data and algorithms to transform data for all information and data used by more than one stakeholder, including learning providers.**
 - **Data quality.**

Commitment to the objectives

3. By signing this protocol, we are committing to reform by balancing the burden on learning providers of data collection and reporting, while ensuring that providers and data users have the most useful information about learners, learning and about the performance of learning providers.
4. We are committed to:
 - Improving the quality and use of information in support of effective decision making by all stakeholders in the sector.
 - Significantly reducing bureaucracy across the FE system to release time, resources and energy for front line services.
 - Improving accountability to learners, learning providers and data users for data standards, collections and reporting.

Commitment to working together to deliver the objectives

5. We are committing to working together with all FE system stakeholders to deliver these objectives.

6. By signing this protocol, we are committing to:

- Reducing the quantity and variation of different data requests to learning providers by working through an independently-chaired FE *information authority* as a single gatekeeper for setting information, collection and reporting standards.
- Abiding by a set of data standards, collections and reporting standards collectively negotiated and resolved with and through *the information authority* - to the wider benefit of the sector.
- Championing *the information authority* principles to ensure that use of data is maximised and burden minimised

Establishing authority

7. By signing this protocol, we have established the authority of *the information authority*. Government Ministers have asked the sector to work together to reform FE data. That Ministerial remit, the appointment of an independent chair to *the information authority* board and our agreement to this protocol give *the information authority* the authority to deliver reforms to data systems.

Relationships

8. *The information authority* must work within existing standards and structures. These include Office for National Statistics (ONS), **the Government Statistical Service (GSS)**, the Information Standards Board (ISB), the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) programme (notably the Common Data Definitions component) and the Schools Star Chamber. *The information authority* must also recognise the reciprocal arrangements governing FE in Higher Education (HE) and HE in FE.

What we expect from *the information authority* and the reforms

9. In return for committing to the objectives, and to working together under *the information authority*, we expect the chair, board and secretariat to:

- Take our requirements seriously - recognising the independence and different missions of signatory organisations and other stakeholders. Deliver transparent criteria and processes for assessing and balancing data requests.
- Recognise the core of information required by an effective learning provider for their own management.
- Make sure we have better data - more frequent, more up-to-date, more accurate, more relevant, more responsive, more consistent and more complete.
- Ensure we still have access to data - raw detailed individual level data to develop and pilot new algorithms, methodologies and measures. These developments and flexible analyses must be encouraged and flourish. What we are committing to is consulting and agreeing these within *the information authority* before they go live.
- Deliver the reforms - demonstrate and prove that requirements are being met from new arrangements before old collections and reports are switched off.
- Defend and represent the wider interests of the sector, not just the interests of their own organisations. Stakeholder views must be heard and decisions must be transparent.
- Publish standards, make them readily available and encourage their use.
- Give stakeholders early warning of any plans or initiatives that may impact on data standards, collections and reports.

Priorities

10. As signatories, we are emphasising that agreement on the algorithms, derivations and methodologies for producing performance and quality measures is the most important issue. Such agreement (and publicising and promoting them) would mean

that the burden of reconciling and validating performance and quality measures in reports would be significantly reduced. If that issue is addressed, it matters less who collects and reports on the data.

Commending *the information authority* approach

11. There are a wide range of FE system stakeholders - including the learning providers and learners themselves. Practically, not all stakeholders can be signatories to this protocol. However, as signatories, we are commending *the information authority* approach to all FE system stakeholders - and asking them to work with *the information authority* on information, collection and reporting standards with the objective of reforming FE data, maximising benefits and minimising burden.

Terms of Reference

The Government White Paper 'Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances' identified a need to bring together the information needs of all the organisations that request information from the Further Education (FE) system and to agree what will be required from all providers, based on common standards. Data is to be collected once and used for a variety of purposes. The intent is to ensure that only priority information is collected and that reports are presented in a standard format.

This has led to the establishment of a single mechanism, or gatekeeper, for setting information standards and data and reporting requirements, *the information authority*.

The information authority board's decisions will reform data and information across the FE system. **We are working with the [Data Service](#), which is responsible for the collection and dissemination of data and for streamlining data collection and use.**

Authority

The information authority's powers come from;

- Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) Ministers asking the sector to work together to reform FE data.
- The ministerial appointment of an independent chair to *the information authority* board and the cross-system membership of the board.
- A protocol agreement signed by stakeholder organisations, agreeing to work together to deliver the authority's objectives, to reform FE data.

Relationships

***The information authority* will work alongside other standards bodies to facilitate the establishment of data standards that will benefit the whole of the education sector where possible and where appropriate.** These include Office for National Statistics (ONS), **the Government Statistical Service (GSS)**, the Information Standards Board (ISB), the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) programme (notably the Common Data Definitions component) and the Schools Star Chamber. *The information authority* will also recognise the reciprocal arrangements governing FE in Higher Education (HE) and HE in FE.

Overall objective

The board will oversee key data and information reforms across the FE system by directing the overall strategy for data collection and reporting, and determining data definitions and standards.

Range of decisions

The board will take decisions on:

- The data standards that will be used in collection and reporting.
- The data items to be collected.
- What information will be made available and disseminated and the rules for its use, e.g. the use of 'early findings' reports; the purpose of data sharing; and how data might be shared.
- How frequently data will be collected and reported.
- Data quality: The cycle, timetable and processes for changes to collection and reporting – including receiving, assessing and ruling on proposals for new data collections and fields within the individualised learner record (ILR).

In making those decisions, the board will take account of:

- The principles of *the information authority* that use of data is maximised and burden is minimised.
- The wider interests of the FE system as a whole – and not just the interests of their own organisations.
- Representations from the system, through the secretariat, so that data user and data provider stakeholders can influence board decisions.
- The need for stability and appropriate notice of change to FE data standards.

Scope of decisions

The main scope of the board's decisions will be:

- Post-16 learning across the English FE system – including FE colleges, FE learning through other institutions, work-based learning, Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) – but not including HE.
- Data about learners and their learning and other types of data e.g. data on staff, awarding data as it affects providers, and data covered by the Framework for Excellence, will be in scope.

The board will have an interest in (and influence on) data standards, collections and reporting about and in school sixth forms, HE and in other UK countries. However, while working to ensure that the data needed from those systems is available to the FE system, the board will not have primary responsibility, **but will work alongside other standards bodies to facilitate the establishment of data standards that will benefit the whole of the education sector where possible and where appropriate.**

Operation of board meetings

Board meetings will operate as follows:

- Board members are primarily the organisations that have signed *the information authority* protocol. Wherever possible decisions will be reached by consensus. If a formal vote becomes necessary, each organisation shall have one vote. The chairman shall have a second 'casting' vote in the event of a tied decision.
- Each protocol signatory has a named representative for board meetings. Substitutes will need to be agreed in advance with the chairman.
- The quorum for board meetings is the chair plus four board members.
- Additional attendees will need the agreement of the chair. The head of the secretariat is a permanent attendee.
- The secretariat will distribute papers to board members at least one week in advance of the meeting so that members have time to prepare.

A separate operating procedure has been agreed for the [Appeals Process](#).

Appendix C – Actual spend for financial year 2008/09

Cost item	Original Budget 2008/9 (£k)	Outturn 2008/9 (£k)	Variance against budget (£k)
Permanent Staff Costs	456	336	-120
Non project temporary resource	124	129	5
Recruitment costs	25	17	-8
Training, Travel and incidentals	34	28	-6
<u>Total Staff Costs</u>	639	510	- 129
Marketing costs	138	119	-19
Meeting costs	13	10	-3
<u>Projects</u>			
Data Standards	75	85	10
Paper Based Learner Documentation	100	40	-60
Legal Costs	16	0	-16
Data Quality	44	44	0
Awarding Body standards	50	0	-50
Information Standards Board definitions work	50	50	0
Unallocated	24	0	-24
Revenue Total	1,149	858	-291
CAPITAL			
Buildings and Services			
Staff Support costs	63	57	-6
IA Portal Development and support	87	10	-77
Capital Total	150	67	-83
Total Budget	1,299	925	-374

Appendix D - Breakdown of budget and forecast spend for 2009/10

Cost item	Budget 2009/10	Forecasting Assumptions
REVENUE		
Staff Costs		
Permanent Staff (08-09)	595,214	12 staff
Contractors/Temporary Staff		
Recruitment costs		
Training Costs/Travel and conference	45,000	
Total staff costs	640,214	
Staff Support Costs	108,000	Based upon the 12 non-admin posts @£9k per annum
Stakeholder Engagement		
Materials	35,000	
Conferences	25,000	
Workshops	20,000	
Publications	20,000	
Communications Consultancy	20,000	
Total Engagement costs	120,000	
Information Authority Board	10,000	4 x meetings @ 2500 per meeting
Projects		
Project Support Resource	60,000	3 days per week for support
Qualification Success Rates	50,000	
Guidance for new providers	30,000	Technical Author specialist to complete this work
ISB Standards	20,000	
Ofsted Requirements	20,000	
Standards	22,000	Work commenced in 2008 – to be completed at the end of May 2009
Data Quality	44,000	Based upon an additional 45 days from June to end September 2009
ILR Reform – Strategy	50,000	
Unallocated	25,786	
Total Project costs	321,786	
Revenue Total	1,200,000	
CAPITAL		
Buildings and Services		
IA Portal Development	80,000	Corporate website and FE Connect
IA Portal Service and Support		
Capital Total	80,000	
Total Budget	1,280,000	Original Budget £1,455,151
Admin Staff Costs	84,200	3 staff
Total forecast for the secretariat	1,357,000	

Forecasting Assumptions:

- Forecast staff costs are based upon all vacant posts being filled by July 2009. The recruitment process for the Data Specification Developer is currently underway and it is hoped that a successful candidate will be in place by July.
- There are three “administration” posts that are funded by the LSC, and therefore these costs are shown at the bottom of the summary forecast and are not considered to be included within the £1.2m budget the authority has been given for 2009/10.
- Capital spend includes the XML work (£30k) to be completed on *the information authority* Corporate website and FEConnect. The remaining £50k capital budget is intended for further XML development if the board approves the conversion of the ILR to XML format.
- Temporary resource for the *Data Quality* Project has been extended to the end of September 2009, when a full handover to the Data Quality and Improvement Manager will have been completed.

Appendix E - Risks and issues

Key Issues

No.	Issue	Action
01	Machinery of Government changes. There is a need to assess how this might affect <i>the information authority</i> in future.	Ongoing dialogue with DIUS and local authorities. Engagement with SFA and YPLA is dependent on permanent appointments to these organisations.
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. DCSF currently engage with LAs on a formal basis via the ICES group. <i>The information authority</i> attended the ICES group in February 2009 to raise awareness of the authority and its role.
03	Provider feedback has been that early delivery of the ILR Specification is insufficient in isolation. There is a requirement to publish timetables for LAD/LIS etc. In order to progress with this there is a requirement for commitment from the LSC/DIUS etc. to deliver the requirements at the right time.	<i>The information authority</i> to commence dialogue with LSC, DIUS, DCSF and the Data Service. Some preliminary work has commenced to determine the feasibility of publishing timetables. Further discussions and detailed analysis work is currently underway. An approved timetable is scheduled for publication in early October 2009.

Key Risks

No	Risk Description and Impact	Mitigating Actions
01	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.
02	There is a risk that data standards are not agreed, resulting in the continuing mismatch of data requirements.	The information authority will continue to work with other interested parties e.g. the Information Standards Board, to develop and agree key common data standards where they do not exist. (A recent example is the development of an ethnicity data standard).

No	Risk Description and Impact	Mitigating Actions
03	<p>The outputs from the Data Burden Study are not addressed by the appropriate owners, recommendations are not achievable, or other LSC priorities result in the inability to address issues in timely manner.</p>	<p><i>The information authority</i> is working with different stakeholders to agree firm actions plans. Where these are not forthcoming, the secretariat will escalate to the board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The "Reducing the paper burden on providers" piece of work was completed earlier this year and the LSC is responding to this at the June 2009 board meeting. -The LSC IM Planning team have recruited specialist resource to work with Regional and local LSC offices to gather further detail around unscheduled requests with a view to developing a baseline. - Agreement in principle to a common standard on awarding data has been achieved; further work and encouragement is required for awarding bodies and software developers to become activity involved in SIFA. - The secretariat is working closely with the Train to Gain team on burden related issues. - <i>The information authority</i> is working with Connexions and the Data Service to determine how data demands can be streamlined.
04	<p>There is a risk that <i>the information authority</i> could be viewed as being partial to DIUS and the Skills Funding Agency as a result of the secretariat being hosted within the SFA. It could lose its reputation for being an independent authority and therefore threaten the confidence of the FE community.</p>	<p>Continue to draw on the cross -system experience of <i>the information authority</i> board and act as neutrally as possible.</p>
05	<p>The secretariat may have insufficient resource and skills to complete all deliverables within the work plan for 2009/10.</p>	<p>Most of the approved new posts have now been filled, with the Data Specification Developer role to be filled during in July.</p> <p>The secretariat is currently reviewing its plan and prioritising the key Workstreams and associated activities. This will highlight any significant gaps within the authority, in terms of skills and resources. This exercise is due to be completed by mid June.</p>