



## ***The information authority***

Paper 9: Data Harmonisation

Author: Mike Davis

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> February 2009

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

This paper is prepared for *the information authority* board (“the board”) meeting on 4 March 2009, to update it with work being undertaken by the Data Harmonisation group.

The board is asked to confirm it is content with the proposals for taking this work forward.

## **2. Background**

The Data Harmonisation Group was created in the summer of 2008. It was as a direct response to the findings of the David Mason report titled ‘Harmonising OFSTED and LSC Qualification Success Reporting’ and the much wider disquiet over the lack of ownership or architecture for existing and new success rate methodologies.

The group has grown in size and now has full partner representation from DIUS, DCSF, LSC, Ofsted, *the information authority* and the Data Service. Lesley Davies (LSC) chairs the group. There is a main working group, but smaller groups will be created/disbanded as and when necessary. This will enable different types of success rate (SR) and data problems to be tackled by specialists.

A key ‘Principles/commitments’ document has been shared with all partners on the understanding that subject to minor changes, each organisation will commit to the ‘Success Rate Harmonisation’ agenda. Only by working collaboratively can the FE sector achieve an equitable outcome. This journey will need commitment, compromise and the necessary resources to undertake investigative analysis and collectively build (if required) new systems.

At present the LSC uses qualification success rates (QSRs) at various levels of aggregation for a variety of purposes. This includes, but not restricted to: planning, commissioning, funding (determination of funding rates), performance assessment, Framework for Excellence and minimum levels of performance. The Data Service produces on behalf of DIUS, the ‘Statistical First Release’ reports using standard LSC definitions. Ofsted however, who use SRs as a primary source of evidence to support judgements both prior to and during an inspection, often apply different criteria. This is historic, but well established. Ofsted use these different definitions to calculate national SR averages at various levels of aggregation. Ofsted then produces two specific reports (annually): the ‘College Performance Report’ and a work based learning report titled the ‘Provider Performance Report’. In addition Ofsted collects other data directly from providers and has developed specific SR methodologies to apply in different circumstances e.g. E2E, DWP provision. These differences are confusing to the sector and can lead to very different judgements based on the same underlying performance information.

### **3. Work of the Harmonisation Group**

#### **Areas of the Data Harmonisation group's work:**

The Data Harmonisation group has met 6 times. Some of the items discussed include:

- 1 Standardising Apprenticeship QSR (mapping and presentation)
- 2 Harmonising QSR for Train to Gain
- 3 FE success rate methodology – 2008/09
- 4 Schools with sixth forms and QSR
- 5 Releasing QSR pseudo codes to the FE sector
- 6 Non accredited learning
- 7 SFR details
- 8 FE QSR for HE providers
- 9 Measuring employment outcomes
- 10 Qualifications and Credit Framework
- 11 ILR success rate analysis
- 12 QSR governance
- 13 Designing a single SR methodology for the FE system.

What is clear from the work to date is that whilst all of these issues can be resolved they will take time, resources and collective resolve. The fact that all parties are talking about common issues is a major step forward. Also the agreement to block any changes to QSR methodology (unless agreed by the group and taken through due governance processes) will stop proliferation.

#### **Data Harmonisation - Working Group**

Most of the DH working group's time to date has focused on the first two on the above list.

##### **1 Standardising Apprenticeship QSR (mapping and presentation)**

The LSC and Ofsted have agreed to continue using the existing 'New Measures of Success' QSR methodology: 'Overall and 'Timely' as this reflects current practice. However, a new mapping is being explored with the Sector Skills Councils, UKCES, AoC and ALPs. This will map each framework onto QCA's Sector Subject Area list at Tier 1 and Tier 2. If agreed, analytic work on the new model will be undertaken to evaluate any technical/policy issues and the impact. If deemed manageable, the Data Service has made a commitment to develop new standardised apprenticeship reports based on the new model. If available in time, Ofsted will start using the new reports on all inspections from September 2009 (new inspection cycle). The LSC for its part will (if possible), will start parallel running old and new methods when period 12 (2008/09) is published. In 2010, MLP's will be adjusted to reflect the new standardised approach.

To enable all of this to be achieved a full consultative process will need to be agreed. The communication strategy referred to under 'Next Steps' at the end of the paper is key to this and other planned activities.

To take this work forward a project manager was appointed and additional resources have been offered if required.

## **2 Harmonising a QSR for Train to Gain (T2G)**

The working group considered that this project is more problematic and longer term. To proceed, the Partners will need to agree a 'QSR Vision' paper that sets out in clear detail the overall concept for the work with various options and any limitations. Whilst within the group there was strong support for changing the current methodology as currently applied by the LSC and DIUS, a number of fundamental questions need answering before we can proceed. Here are some of them:

- For consistency, should all 'Employer Responsive' (ER) provision (roll on roll off) be treated the same?
- If 'No' how best to proceed?
- If 'Yes' then what would be the impact of changing the T2G SR rate to a modified 'Timely' based measure – say with a 3 months grace period? Also would such a move necessitate changing the Apprenticeship and Advanced Apprenticeship headline 'Overall' SR measure to create a unified overall/hybrid measure? What would be the impact on SR for NVQs outcomes traditionally delivered in a college? Prior to the introduction of DLF methodology in 2008/09 these were a part of the Further Education data set
- Would a move to a standard ER approach, have a positive or negative impact on the contribution T2G outcomes might make towards Government targets?
- Would a changed approach be accepted by the sector as fairer and providing greater transparency or would they perceive it as setting unrealistic expectations?
- At a time of recession, would a change of methodology be helpful or a hindrance, given the emerging flexibilities that are being introduced?

**Note:** There are many more, but these illustrate the overall complexities:

In summary, devoid of the bigger questions being resolved, the group felt that they could only make the following recommendations:

- For academic years 2007/08 and 2008/09 the LSC and FfE will use the current T2G SR definition based on a modified FE learner responsiveness methodology – **January 2009 onward**
- Ofsted to stop using 'provider' collected data as soon as it is confident that the LSC data can be used to create 'Overall' and 'Timely' SR data, the necessary reporting tools are developed/tested and impact analysis completed. The very latest this will happen is readiness for September 2009 inspections – **target Summer 2009**

Whilst this is disappointing, it brings into sharp relief the need for a holistic solution. To take the work forward a discussion paper entitled 'A single Success Rate Methodology for the FE system' is currently being drafted prior to circulation. The T2G DH problem could be resolved if in part or all of proposals are accepted.

#### **4. FE Sector Implications**

The implications for the FE sector are considerable. In the quest to achieve a fair and consistent SR model that can be applied to all post 16 provision, it is possible in the short term, there will be winners and losers. In particular the recalculation of historic success rates (if necessary) might impact on existing performance measures and government targets. Also with the imminent MoG changes, we need to be sure that DIUS/DCSF as well as the new commissioners, for example local authorities and the 'Skills Funding Agency' support a unified approach. On the schools side for instance, data collection is different from colleges making a common SR solution more complex. However, with the development of the school 'report card' and modifications in the FfE 'score card' the requirement for standardisation is ever more pressing.

Also, we have to be sure that any change in methodologies, must not exert additional burden on the FE (post 16) sector. The existing ILR data collection processes, perhaps with slight modifications, should be able to capture all of the baseline data necessary to undertake current and new SR calculations. However, in some instances, where the current data collection methods are not 'fit for purpose' they might have to be slightly changed or added too.

Whilst the journey ahead remains unclear the commitment to resolve SR issues needs to be communicated to the FE sector. Further, a clear timetable needs to be agreed and publicised. Wherever possible, the 'Partners' need to engage with the FE sector at all levels for example, through focus/consultative groups. Key to developing a communication strategy are public statements from DIUS and DCSF in support of any agreed direction and processes.

#### **5. Next Steps**

*The information authority* has a key role in not only sponsoring this work but actively communicating to the sector progress and planned activities. Currently, some colleges and provider have a sense that something is going on, but are rightly concerned that they don't know what. Further, in terms of planning and commercial software development, the need for definitive pseudo code (2008/09 outcomes) is growing.

It therefore proposed that:

- The board continues to support the work of Data Harmonisation Group.

- *The information authority* secretariat (“the secretariat”) actively engages in the communication process, by helping to develop a communication strategy and then promoting it through the various avenues it has at its disposal. This is being planned.
- The secretariat helps develop an action plan that will enable the release of pseudo code etc. in a timely manner as well as informing the FE sector of what is planned and what the impact is likely to be.

**Timelines:**

- Produce a communication strategy - end of March 2009
- Pseudo code for 2008/09 outcomes released to the sector – latest end of June 2009

**6. Contact Details**

- a. Author: Mike Davis
- b. Job Title: Her Majesty Inspector
- c. Department/Organisation: Ofsted
- d. E-mail address: mike.davis@ofsted.gov.uk
- e. Phone Number: 07764629960
- f. Date Paper Created: 16th February 2009