

Paper

Paper 8 - ILR Specification Timetable for 2011/12

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Audience	the information authority board - 30 September 2009
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Introduction

- 1 This paper is prepared for the *information authority board* ('the board') meeting on 30 September 2009 to ask it to agree the timetable for publishing the specification of the individualised learner record (ILR) for 2011/12.
- 2 The paper sets out the rationale for the 2010/11 timetable, describes strengths and weaknesses of that timetable, makes proposals about adjustments to it for 2011/12 and recommends a timetable for 2011/12.

Background

- 3 The Board discussed the timetable for specifying the ILR for 2010/11 at the board meeting on 3 December 2008. At that meeting *the information authority* secretariat ('the secretariat') recommended the last date for making a request to change the ILR should be brought further forward to avoid the majority of development and consultation about changes falling in July and August when it is difficult to make progress because of staff holidays across all stakeholder organisations. The board agreed to leave the timetable unchanged from the previous year. One of the reasons for doing so was that it considered making a decision to revise the timetable in December gave data consuming stakeholders insufficient time to prepare for an earlier close date. For this reason this paper is prepared for the September rather than the December board meeting. This has the disadvantage of being before the review of the change process for the 2010/11 specification, the one that is just completing, has taken place at which all stakeholders have the opportunity to identify and discuss issues with it.

- 4 The timetable has always been and is always likely to be a compromise between those wanting early publication, mainly providers and software suppliers, and those wanting later publication, mainly policy colleagues in the data consuming organisations.
- 5 The publication of the specification is important since once it is published providers can plan changes to their enrolment processes and forms. It also finally draws to a close the opportunity to change the ILR specification to reflect emerging, new or amended policy requirements apart from those that can be accommodated in the flexible national monitoring fields in the specification. It gives software developers a firm basis on which to design and implement changes to their systems for deployment by the start of the teaching year. Where changes are made to the specification at a late stage this often results in poor data quality, at least in the first year, because the change is not fully thought through and providers have too little time to prepare. Poor data quality in turn leads to unreliable management information (MI). Late changes also tend to increase the cost of developing and implementing changes to computer systems.
- 6 There is an in built tension between those wanting early publication and those who want the latest possible publication date. Those who want earlier publication include staff in providers planning processes for the coming year and software developers in all stakeholders. Those who want later publication include some policy colleagues in funding and planning bodies and the Departments. Policy colleagues in these organisations often want the maximum opportunity to ensure the ILR collects data relevant to new, changed and emerging policies so that it can be used to generate MI used in their evaluation. Those in these organisations who use the ILR to produce statistics, often at a national or regional level, tend to be more concerned about stability of the specification and more supportive of early publication.
- 7 For years up to 2007/08 the ILR specification was published in early March. Since then the board has brought forward this date:

Specification for Year	Publication Date
2008/09	25 January 2008
2009/10	28 November 2008
2010/11	27 November 2009

- 8 In both the comparable data collection arrangements, the schools and higher education (HE) data collections, specifications typically are published a year in advance of the start of the year to which they apply, for example by 31 July 2008 for the 2009/10 year starting in August 2009. In both these arrangements this is to give providers and software suppliers more time to prepare for the benefits identified above.

Key points and issues

Process for 2010/11

- 9 The secretariat has to date identified the following main issues for it with the timetable for publishing the 2010/11 specification by 27 November 2009:
- as for the previous years and despite agreement to do otherwise the vast majority of change requests were sent on or very close to the final date for receipt of them. Helpfully the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which made 42 of the 60 requests, did discuss the emerging changes with the secretariat but it was only on the close date that it sent those requests that it chose to ask the secretariat to investigate.
 - the receipt of so many changes near to the final date again left the secretariat having to undertake almost all investigation of and consultation about changes during July and August. Progress was impaired. This has led to some requests not being fully evaluated in time. In some cases the secretariat has for this reason recommended the change is not implemented in 2010/11 to allow sufficient time for full investigation and in other cases to asking the board to agree a change in principle while investigation, consultation and evaluation continues through September to October.
 - the LSC chose to send its requests to the secretariat in a format which contained different and incomplete information from that requested by the secretariat. This delayed and made more complex investigation and evaluation of the requests.
 - as the implementation of Machinery of Government (MOG) has progressed it has become necessary to consult more organisations than in previous years about requirements and solutions. In previous years requirements and solutions were largely defined and agreed with the LSC, which also represented the then Department of Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS), with a need sometimes to consult the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). This year almost all requirements have needed some input from the LSC, the emerging Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Young Peoples' Learning Agency (YPLA), and the two current departments, the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), as well as sometimes with Ofsted. This inevitably takes more time.

The secretariat will be holding a full review of the process with all stakeholders in order to improve the process for the 2011/12 specification.

Options for 2011/12 timetable

- 10 In summary, to overcome the problems encountered by needing to investigate and consult about changes in July and August, three timetable options have been developed. These are the same options presented to the board last year:

- bring forward close date for requests, consultation and board meeting and publish in October
- bring forward close date for requests and consultation and as in the previous two years hold board meeting late September and publish in late November
- follow a similar timetable as that used in the previous two years and attempt for a second time to mitigate the slow progress made in July and August

A table in the appendix sets out the timetables for these options, including the one used in the previous year, along with their strengths and weaknesses. It can be used to compare them.

11 The options are described in more detail below.

Option 1 – Bring forward close date for requests, consultation and board meeting and publish in October

In this option the close date for requests for change would be 9 April 2010. At this close date a requestor would need to be clear about what outcome was needed and have sufficient information to work with the secretariat on detailed proposals to achieve this outcome. Consultation with providers would end 18 June 2010, the board would meet week commencing 12 July 2010 to agree changes and the specification would be published on 22 October 2010.

The strengths of this option are:

- the specification would be published five weeks earlier than in the previous year
- the summary of confirmed changes would be published in July 2010, three months earlier than in the previous year
- no consultation or significant stakeholder interaction is planned for the slow period between mid-July and the end of August

The weaknesses of this option are:

- the closing date for requests would be 9 April 2010, 11 weeks earlier than the previous year and the earliest close date of all the options, when in some cases it would be harder for stakeholders to be sure of their requirement
- the board did not support this option last year

Option 2 – Bring forward close date for requests and consultation, and as for previous year hold board meeting in late September and publish in November.

In this option the closing date for requests for change would be 21 May 2010, consultation with providers would end 16 July 2010, the Board would meet week commencing 20 September 2010 to agree changes and the specification would be published 12 November 2010.

The strengths of this option are:

- no consultation or significant stakeholder interaction is planned for the slow period between mid-July and the end of August thereby improving the completeness and detail of input to the board paper
- specification is published two weeks earlier than in the previous year

The weaknesses of this option are:

- the closing date for requests is 7 May 2010, seven weeks earlier than the previous year, when in some cases it would be harder for stakeholders to be sure of their requirements
- the board did not support this option last year

Option 3 – Follow similar timetable to that used for the last two years and introduce mitigations.

In this option the timetable for the process would be similar to that for the previous year. Mitigations would be developed with stakeholders during the review of the process to produce the 2010/11 specification. These could include:

- receiving and working on requests throughout the year
- making a further attempt to gain commitment from organisations making requests to deliver requests on an ongoing basis and not to leave sending them to the secretariat until immediately before the close date
- returning any request that contains incomplete information or is not in the format supplied by the secretariat
- asking requestors to describe and discuss their requests at a secretariat provider consultation group shortly after the close date to establish quickly how closely each request meets the published criteria.
- reviewing all requests immediately after the close date for receiving them and rejecting all those that are ill defined so that resource can be dedicated to taking forward well defined requests

The strengths of this option are:

- the close date for requests is unchanged at 25 June 2010, the latest date of all the options
- this was the timetable option favoured by the board when it discussed them last year.

The weaknesses of this option are:

- as in the previous two years consultation and significant stakeholder interaction is planned between mid-July and the end of August.
- mitigation introduced for the most recent year, specification for 2010/11, was not effective.

Recommendation

12 The secretariat recognises that during the next year in which Machinery of Government changes are implemented it would be more difficult than in other years for data requesting organisations and in particular the SFA and YPLA to meet a timetable requiring earlier delivery of change requests.

Consequently for development of the 2011/12 specification only the board is recommended to approve option 3, that is, to follow a similar timetable to that used for last two years and introduce the mitigations described.

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ILR Specification Timetable for 2009/10 and Options for 2011/12

Activity	2011/12 Option 1	2011/12 Option 2	2010/11 Actual Option 3
Communicate 2011/12 ILR change process and publication timetable	November 2010	November 2010	February 2009
Initial requirements gathering – opportunity for informal discussions with <i>the information authority</i>	January to March 2010	March to May 2010	March to June 2009
Closing date for requests for change to the specification.	9 April 2010	21 May 2010	26 June 2009
Publish comprehensive list of all changes received	April 2010	Early June 2010	July 2009
Consult with providers and stakeholders on possible changes.	April to June 2010	May to mid July 2010	July and August 2009
Consultation with stakeholders closes.	18 June 2010	16 July 2010	4 September 2009
Recommendations prepared for board consideration	2 July 2010	10 September 2010	19 September 2009
<i>The information authority</i> board meets to agree the specification.	wc 12 July 2010	wc 20 September 2010	30 September 2009
Publish summary of confirmed changes.	July 2010	October 2010	October 2009
Publish 2011/12 ILR Specification	22 October 2010	12 November 2010	27 November 2009
Publish 2011/12 ILR Validation Rules	17 December 2010	14 January 2011	29 January 2010
Strengths	earliest publication of specification earliest list of confirmed changes avoids engagement in July/August	avoids engagement in July/August earlier publication of specification	latest close date for requests
Weaknesses	earliest close date for requests	earlier close date for requests	engagement in July/August