

# Minutes

<b>Date</b>	3 November 2011
<b>Subject</b>	Software Supplier Group Meeting
<b>Location</b>	Cheylesmore House, Coventry CV1 2WT
<b>Time</b>	12:30-4pm
<b>Publication intent</b>	PUBLIC DOCUMENT

---

## Item 1. Welcome and introductions

## Item 2. Minutes of last meeting

## Item 3. 2011/12 ILR and changes for 2012/13

- 3.1 Lisa Macdougall acknowledged what a challenge it has been to move to a single ILR in XML and thanked software writers for their help in viewing and commenting on draft ILR documentation and beta versions of the Learner Information Suite (LIS).
- 3.2 Lisa was asked to clarify the criteria to identify 16-18 Apprenticeships. The following criteria was provided by the Data Service and emailed to the group in early October: Return all learning delivery and associated records for learners with at-least 1 learning delivery record where Age at start under 18 A\_AGESTB = (1 or 2) AND Progtype = (2,3,10.20 or 21).
- 3.3 Lisa ran through the known issues and informed the group that a forthcoming maintenance release for the online data collection system (OLDC) will rectify these. She explained that there have been issues with destination data that have arisen due to the difficulties of amalgamating LR and ER data. It seems that some precedence rules are not being implemented by the LIS. There is not a fixed date for the maintenance release but it may well tie in with the release of version 2 of LIS 19.
- 3.4 Lisa gave a presentation on the key changes for 2012/13. Further information is available in [the presentation slides](#). The group were reminded that there is a 'late' ILR change process in place this year. It will only look at requests that are essential for funding in 2012/13. The closing date for change requests is Friday 18 November 2011. The sector will be consulted on any proposed changes that meet the assessment criteria. The expectation is that the bulk of the funding simplification from both the Skills Funding Agency and Young People's Learning Agency will be introduced in 2013/14 and so it is not expected that there will be any major late changes for 2012/13.

- 3.5 There was a discussion on preparing systems and software for 2013/14. The group want to see work on 2013/14 systems start as soon as possible and reiterated that for them to have provider systems ready in good time, the LIS, LARA, funding methodology etc. all need to be available at the same time as the 2013/14 ILR specification i.e. by the end of November 2012. Nick Chomyk informed the group that the Skills Funding Agency has already committed to producing a 'shadow' 2013/14 funding calculation by March 2012. This will enable providers to start to see the likely funding they would receive for the same provision in 2013/14.
- 3.6 Members of the group commented that for 2011/12, there seems to be too much data collected regarding a learner's employment status. Some providers are finding it problematic to collect it all. Lisa pointed out that there have always been five or six fields relating to employment status and so there is no more data to collect this year. However, Lisa is working with data users to reduce the amount of data being collected and on changes for this. One option being considered is to replace the current employment status categories with far fewer options, and for those options to be written in plain English. The sector has frequently commented that learners do not understand what is meant by some of the current terms, such as 'economically inactive'.
- 3.7 If possible, the aim is to collect employment status just once and for that to be based on the learner's status in the week prior to enrolment (although some specific programmes, such as Access to Apprenticeships, may still require in year updates on a learner's employment status). Lisa informed the group that work on this is continuing.

#### **Item 4. Unique aim identifiers in the ILR**

- 4.1 Pete Ashton led a discussion with the group about introducing a unique aim identifier in the ILR. It is proposed that the aim identifier be held at learning aim level and this will require each aim that a learner is undertaking to be identified uniquely and permanently across ILR returns and academic years. There was a 2012/13 ILR change request to introduce this to improve MI reporting. Pete is still working with colleagues internally to establish specifically what is required and what benefits this would have for the FE system.
- 4.2 Many members of the group responded to a survey on this subject prior to the meeting. Pete informed the group that the survey results were very mixed. Some are very much in favour of it, whereas others strongly oppose it. Those against the proposals questioned whether learning providers would support a change that adds to their workloads and system costs. There was a debate about what benefits learners or providers would gain from this change. It was pointed out that although the main driver seems to be improving MI reporting capabilities, a unique identifier may also enable providers resolve LIS errors far more quickly.
- 4.3 Pete said that investigative work on this would continue, but that it would not be introduced until 2013/14 at the earliest. He confirmed that the group would be consulted further before any final decision is made.

## Item 5. Data Service software update

- 5.1 Richard Williams, the Head of the Data Service, gave a presentation to the group on the strategic replatforming of data collection systems. Further information is available in [the presentation slides](#).
- 5.2 There was a discussion about the sector's need for accurate LIS reports. Richard pointed out that LIS reports are based on published methodology and so it is possible for software writers or providers to generate their own versions of the reports. Some members of the group commented that the LIS reports are business critical because the LIS is always right as far as funding is concerned. Therefore, providers want to be certain what funding they will get based on the data they return.
- 5.3 Rich informed the group that the Data Service will provide an updated version of the Learning Aim Reference Application (LARA) later this academic year. He will provide an accurate date as soon as possible, but informed the group that they should not expect a new version of LARA before March 2012.
- 5.4 There was another discussion about the timescales for the delivery of future data systems / software (as documented in minute 3.5). Richard said he shares the group's aspirations to get fully functioning systems ready far earlier and will do what he can to support it. However, he did question whether the group's proposed timescales are achievable and pointed out that the Data Service's software itself can only be produced once other agencies have decided on their policies.
- 5.5 Richard reassured the group that future years will run far more smoothly. This year has seen unprecedented levels of system change, but the result is that the Data Service is now far better equipped to handle future changes.
- 5.6 The Data Service has been monitoring 2011/12 data returns and has noticed a couple of things. Firstly that some learning providers do not seem aware of the importance of correct use of A and B files. The other issue is that some providers have already used up a high number of transmission numbers (and there is an upper limit for the year). The Data Service may well produce some further communications on this, but Richard suggested that the group might also bring this to the attention of their customers. Since the meeting, the following 'How to' guide has been published:  
[http://www.theia.org.uk/News/LatestNews/HowtoguidetosendingILRdatafor2011\\_12.htm](http://www.theia.org.uk/News/LatestNews/HowtoguidetosendingILRdatafor2011_12.htm)
- 5.7 During the discussion there were a number of issues / requests that the group asked the Data Service to look at. (Data Service responses received thus far have been added in blue):
  - a. Providing information on whether software writers see the OPA module and guidance on how to hook into it.  
They can run the funding calculations by interfacing with the DLL that calls OPA. This is covered in more detail here:  
<http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/BABCCF48-8F50-4592-8A7D-AABA0A0D907B/0/natlisCalculateInterfaceSpecuglis1901v101Nov2011.pdf>

- b. Add the learning aim reference to validation errors on error reports (this would be more useful than the aim sequence number currently provided)  
[We will look into introducing this in a future release of LIS](#)
- c. Where is the guidance on the use of zipped files?  
[In section 6 \(paragraphs 102-104\) of the 2011/12 Provider Support Manual at \[http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/ilrdocuments/201112\\\_guidance.htm\]\(http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/ilrdocuments/201112\_guidance.htm\).](#)
- d. The LIS ER aim export no longer has any SLN values (the SLN is there but the values are all zero)  
[LearnDelSLN has been added to the ER Aim export in LIS 19.01.65](#)
- e. Could a weblink to 'known issues' be put into LIS error message reports (this could reduce support calls for both software suppliers and the Service Desk)
- f. Providers want to install LIS on a server, rather than forcing installation on the C:  
[Quite a lot of users have expressed their need for this requirement. We have been advised that this may be difficult with the current technology and installation process. We will take this forward to requirements for Strategic Replatforming.](#)
- g. Can there be full command line functionality in LIS (not all new options are currently available)
- h. The LIS's indicative occupancy list in 10/11 always showed Year To Date funding in the 'Total YTD' column. This year it appears to show future instalments (not year earned). Providers would expect a column called YTD total to exclude things not yet earned.
- i. Improve the way that LIS FAM code errors are reported.

**Action: The Data Service to look into all of the above and feed back in due course.**

#### **Item 6. Review the implementation of the single ILR in XML**

- 6.1 Paul Kelman gave an overview of the results from a brief survey of software writers regarding readiness for, and the implementation of, the single ILR in XML.
- 6.2 Of the eighteen responses, eleven have already provided MI systems to their customers that are capable of generating XML files. However, several suppliers have also built in a flat file capability and recommended that their customers use the LIS to generate XML for the first few returns.
- 6.3 Paul circulated extracts from some of the additional comments from the survey. The key themes from the comments were:
  - Frustration at the delays in providing a fully functioning LIS. This hampered the development of some systems, added to costs and impacted on learning providers.
  - The sector is paying for the move to XML yet the benefits to learners or providers are unclear.
  - The implementation timescales were unrealistic. Everything needed to be done at least six months earlier.

- There should have been more openness regarding problems and delays in progress. Suppliers were told some go live dates were unequivocal, only to see the dates eventually put back.

### Item 7. The Course Directory

- 7.1 The group were informed that the Course Directory data specification is highly likely to come under the governance of *the information authority*. The Data Service will take responsibility for the collection of Course Directory data from August 2012.
- 7.2 Paul Kelman informed the group that *the information authority* would soon consult software suppliers and others in the sector on any changes to be made to the 2012/13 Course Directory data specification. One key change being considered is to move towards an XML schema, based on the [Exchanging Course Related Information \(XCRI\)](#) standards, some of which have been [approved by the Information Standards Board](#).

### Item 8. Young People's Learning Agency

- 8.1 Alex Cook from the YPLA confirmed that [version 1 of the YPLA's 2010/11 funding calculation](#) would be published imminently. The document is available at:  
[http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/Services/DataCollection/software/lis/lis\\_1901.htm](http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/Services/DataCollection/software/lis/lis_1901.htm)
- 8.2 Alex explained that, for 2012/13, the YPLA intends to rollover its current processes and systems. The intention is to introduce a simplified funding methodology in 2013/4. The YPLA intends to give providers a shadow allocation document alongside their actual 2012/13 allocation. The purpose of this will be to give providers an indication of what funding they can expect in 2013/14.
- 8.3 Alex picked out aspects of the [16-19 Funding Formula Review Consultation](#) that he thought would be of interest to the group. These included:
- Funding should be fair and based on inputs - the group discussed whether this implied that Guided Learning Hours are likely to continue to be important.
  - The funding methodology will be transparent.
  - The YPLA will collect the minimum amount of data to operate its funding system - there was a discussion about the likely impact this could have, given that data items are often needed for other purposes by other organisations.
  - They may consider removing the separate categories for disadvantaged learners – there was a discussion about the challenges of using free school meal eligibility as an indicator in the FE system. The group reiterated their view that many data issues would be resolved if schools adopted the Unique Learner Number.
  - The YPLA may look to fund only programmes – there was a discussion about the need to create a stricter relationship between aims and the programmes they are associated with.

- 8.4 Alex encouraged group members to contribute to the consultation before it closes on 4 January 2012.

### **Item 9. Skills Funding Agency funding policy**

- 9.1 Nick Chomyk from the Skills Funding Agency spoke to the group. Nick informed the group that the Agency has committed to make a '2013/14 shadow funding calculation' available in the LIS in 2011/12. This will enable learning providers to start to gauge what their Skills Funding Agency funded provision would be worth in 2013/14. Nick said that there will be a 'dual running' in 2012/13 so that providers can more accurately monitor what their provision will be worth in 2013/14. The group commented that shadow funding calculations will only be beneficial if providers can break down the total figure to see what each bit of learning provision will be worth. For example, some providers deliver high levels of unlisted funding aims and these seem unlikely to be accounted for in the shadow calculation.
- 9.2 Nick spoke about some of the funding changes being considered. These included creating single aims that would apply to a whole apprenticeship. Removing the 'proportion of funding remaining' (formerly field A51a), but introducing very slight reductions in funding rates to accommodate for that. Not collecting Guided Learning Hours. Paying less for learners who successfully complete ahead of schedule, but recognising that as a positive achievement by the provider.
- 9.3 There was a discussion about whether the YPLA, Skills Funding Agency and HEFCE each working independently on simplification is actually beneficial to the sector. Many group members want to see these organisations work together. Nick commented that they do speak to each other and explained that because each funding organisation works with very different cohorts of learners, their approaches to funding are unlikely to be similar. Nick also pointed out that one of the barriers to implementing a very simplistic funding methodology is that the spending of public money has to be accountable.

### **Item 10. Learning Record Service update**

- 10.1 Carole Morley from the Learning Records Service (LRS) informed the group that the LRS is working to improve its web services and usability. They are also updating their portal for learners to access their Personal Learning Records.
- 10.2 The LRS is also working on data quality and have a new test environment which they are using to work on improving the data matching algorithm.
- 10.3 They are in negotiations with the [A2C project](#) and want to see awarding organisations use the Unique Learner Number as the dataset's learner identifier.
- 10.4 The LRS and Data Service are working together to improve the verification of ULNs on the data collection system. In response to feedback from providers, the aim is to dramatically reduce the time lag for newly created ULNs to be accepted by the online data collection systems.
- 10.5 Following feedback from a recent A2C meeting, where a number of software writers were present, it was agreed that the LRS would try to use *the*

*information authority's* group meetings to give the group earlier notice of any future LRS changes.

**Action: Paul to put this on the agenda for the next meeting.**

### **Item 11. Information Standards Board SIG**

- 11.1 Adrian Kilburn from Capita gave the group an overview of what was discussed at the Information Standards Board Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting in July 2011. Further information is available in [the presentation slides](#).
- 11.2 One of the ISB's main aims is to agree data standards for all education sectors. Adrian reminded the group that anyone can be part of this process. However, it was agreed via email over the summer that Adrian would represent FE software suppliers on the steering group which is looking at the 'known world'.
- 11.3 The ISB are very keen for software suppliers to play a role in their work. Adrian informed the group that the SIG's terms of reference are yet to be agreed and that he aims to ensure that the SIG's remit includes realising the benefits of all education sectors adopting the ULN and agreeing what Unicode standard should be used. The group were very supportive of this.
- 11.4 It was agreed that the group would continue to be kept informed of work going on in this area. If any member of the group wants to contact Adrian directly, they can do so via [adrian.kilburn@capita.co.uk](mailto:adrian.kilburn@capita.co.uk)

### **Item 12. Any other business**

### **Item 13. Provisional dates for group meetings in 2012**

Monday 23 January 2012, Monday 14 May 2012, Thursday 29 November 2012

## List of Attendees on 3 November 2011

Name	Organisation
Adrian Kilburn	Capita
Aidan Hall	Monterpoint
Alex Cook	YPLA
Andy James	Corero
Andy Pointin	Monterpoint
Ben Sansom	DatabridgeMiS
Brian Mann	Capita
Carole Morley	Learning Records Service
Dan Wakefield	Clarity
Jamie Field	Tribal
John Davis	Birmingham LEA (Aqua)
Khushnood Khan	Perspective UK
Lisa Macdougall	<i>The information authority</i>
Luke Fitzgerald	Pellcomp
Martin Cross	Drake Lane Associates
Mike Davies	Unit4 Business Software
Mike Wicks	Data Service
Miriam Cook	Clarity Integration Limited
Neville Richards	Melton Information Services
Nick Chomyk	Skills Funding Agency
Nick Swift	Seetec
Paul Kelman	<i>The information authority</i>
Paul Mann	University for Industry
Paul Tibbetts	Corero
Pete Ashton	<i>The information authority</i>
Pete Hutchinson	Active Data Systems
Peter Adams	Pellcomp
Richard Elmes	Perspective UK
Richard Williams	Data Service
Ste Millington	Compass
Steve Rash	Tribal
Sue Kinch	Corero
Tony Howarth	Cognissoft