



The information authority

Paper 6: FAB Response to the Provider Data Burden Report

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1. What are we asking the board to do?

The board is asked to consider the Federation of Awarding Bodies' response to 'Identifying and Quantifying the Data Burden, and to endorse the actions proposed in section 3 of the paper.

2. Introduction

On the 24 June *the information authority* wrote to the Federation of Awarding Bodies drawing its attention to the conclusions of the Oakleigh Report 'Identifying and Quantifying the Provider Data Burden'.

In its letter the authority asked the Federation to respond with its proposals for tackling the issues raised in the form of a paper and presentation to a subsequent meeting of the board.

This paper is the Federation's response to that request.

3. Response to the Provider Data Burden report

The Federation of Awarding Bodies welcomed the publication of the report and noted that candidate data transactions are considered to be high-value by providers because of their immediate relevance to business needs but also that inconsistency across awarding bodies is seen to cause inefficiencies.

The Federation recognises the importance of effective arrangements between awarding bodies and their customers. It operates an Awarding Bodies and Centres Strategic Working Group under the Chairmanship of Nigel Florence, Executive Director of ABC Awards, precisely to explore opportunities to improve these arrangements.

There is, of course, a potential tension between standardisation and convergence and the wish of providers and learners for a responsive system which supports innovation and retains flexibility for providers to negotiate arrangements with awarding bodies which meet their own specific requirements and needs. The group is conscious of the challenge of balancing these demands.

The Group considered the report at its 16 September meeting and endorsed working with *the information authority* to develop solutions to the issues identified. It also identified that effective intervention required an overview of a number of currently unrelated anti-bureaucracy initiatives and recommended a full mapping of the data collection landscape as a basis for identifying a more coherent way forward.

Awarding bodies subsequently contributed to workshops organised by *the information authority*. The discussions in these events reinforced the importance of positioning any solutions within the wider data landscape to ensure that they would be relevant, effective and future proofed.

The outcomes of these workshops have been reviewed and the Federation is proposing that action is taken jointly with the Information Authority in two areas.

Short term interventions – a number of work streams are identified in Appendix 1 and it is proposed that the Federation works with *the information authority* to explore, prioritise and develop these options (***NB Section 5.1 of the information authority paper summarising the issues***)

Bottom up modelling – it is proposed that DIUS and DCSF be approached to obtain their commitment to a bottom up modelling of all data flows with a view to achieving coherence across current developments, and critically, across potentially divergent bureaucracy reduction interventions.

4. FE Sector Implications

The intention of the programme of work of work is to reduce unwarranted bureaucracy for the FE sector. The process of developing effective interventions will inevitably require the involvement of representatives of the sector in specific consultations and possibly workshops.

5. Next Steps

Subject to the support of the board the Federation will co-operate with the officers of *the information authority* in implementing the programme of work outlined.

In particular we would anticipate a joint approach to DIUS and DCSF to seek their commitment to ensuring that there is coherence across the wider picture of information and data developments.

6. Contact Details

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Appendix 1

Extract from *the information authority* paper on options for tackling awarding issues causing provider data burden

5.1 Option 1 – To focus on short and medium term fixes – To address each of the following areas as individual work-streams, ensuring that the approach to their implementation is cohesive and complementary.

5.1.1 *The Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF)* – as outlined earlier in this paper this could assist with easier exchange of data.

5.1.2 *MIAP Centres* - Development of a new structure for MIAP Centre identifiers – (E.g. a suffix to the UKPRN) to enable early identification. MIAP will begin its requirements gathering on 20th October 2008, with a view to implementation by Sept 2009 – the next major release of MIAP.

5.1.3 *Data Dictionary* - Consider the development of a data dictionary and data standards for data related to exam entry and award notification. Will some of this be delivered in QCF development and could this be extended further?

5.1.4 *Standard formats* - Develop standard formats for CSV files as an interim measure (Some awarding organisations and bodies accept data via CSV files)

5.1.5 *Unique Learner Number (ULN)* – Introduce the mandatory use of the ULN in file format (within all exam transactions) and gradual removal of other learner numbers e.g. candidate numbers. (An impact study would be required). Recommend that ULN be mandatory in 3 years time to allow systems to bed in. Similarly for MIAP centre identifier (this could take longer)

5.1.6 *Learner access to data* – In line with MIAP, there is an opportunity to make provision for improved access to data for learners, but in a controlled environment, particularly for award notification.

5.1.7 *Examination process transactions* – Document and publish the end to end processes (Registration, Data entry, Amendments, Examination Results, Fee payments and acknowledgements etc.) to assist the development of a target operating model

5.1.8 Transportation of data – There is a need to consider how data should be sent and an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of XML/SIF versus web services will need to be completed.

Further work is required to prioritise these options and to determine how they could be delivered e.g. governance and funding. All of the work would require support a wide range of stakeholders.

Option 2 - Long Term - to develop a target operating model to determine “how we would like it to be”. This option is fully supported by those who have a stake in the examinations process. This approach would enable the community to jointly develop a clear strategy and structured approach.

This option will incorporate a comprehensive analysis of each of the following systems and data ownership issues;

5.2.1 Bottom Up Modelling – To start with a "bottom up" modelling of the "business domain", focussing on the system's stakeholders, actors and processes.

5.2.2 Central Hub vs. federated/distributed system – In considering the technical options, as an alternative to the National Assessment Agency's original "central hub" design (and now supported by the signatories to the Capita paper), the Joint Council for Qualifications is in the process of investigating a more federated/distributed system.

5.2.3 Ownership of key data elements - Whatever approach is adopted, it will be important to establish ownership of the key data elements. A successful solution will hinge on i) the ability to mandate usage and ii) the ability to validate data whenever it is transacted.

5.2.4 Information Architecture - Any solution that does not take account of the need to have a clearly defined information architecture as outlined above, will quickly become corrupted by multiple records, variations, out of date data and straightforward inaccuracies- adding to administrative burden, rather than reducing it.

5.2.5 MIS Systems – Ensure that those centres that do not use the commercially available systems/major MIS platforms are considered when scoping solutions.

5.2.6 Routing Issues – Where should data be sent? There is a need to consider resilience of each of the solutions.