

## **Reporting of Achievement Data**

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

The board is asked to confirm that it is content with the recommendations at section 6.

### **2. Introduction**

This paper is prepared for *the information authority* board (“the board”) meeting on 10 June 2009, to update it with two pieces of work to investigate earlier availability of learner responsive outcome data by closing the final individualised learner record (ILR) learner responsive (LR) collection, the F05 return, earlier.

### **3. Background**

#### **3.1. Closing the final ILR in mid-January 2010**

The board, at its meeting on 4 June 2008, agreed to implement a close date of 6 February 2009 for the final 2007/08 ILR learner responsive collection, F05, and to also make it a ‘hard close’ that is, no further returns would be accepted from providers after this date. The board also agreed at this meeting that the secretariat should consult further with stakeholders to investigate if it was possible to bring the final close date of F05 forward from early February to mid-January for years from 2008/09 onwards. This was to meet a request from the LSC funding team to bring forward the date of the final return to support the timetable for making allocations.

The secretariat has taken this work forward in two parts by:

1. Collecting information from providers and data users about their experience of closing F05 for 2007/08 on 6 February 2009 and identifying any issues for them.
2. Investigating and resolving or mitigating the particular issues with closing F05 in mid-January 2010.

Section 4 of the paper describes this work.

#### **3.2. Bringing the Collection of Outcomes Data Much Further Forward**

While the first piece of work, described in section 3.1, was being planned, the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) asked *the information authority* secretariat (“the secretariat”) to investigate bringing much further forward the collection of end-year data to facilitate earlier publication of achievement information. DIUS subsequently described the requirement in its written request in terms of bringing forward the collection of outcomes data. Note: outcomes include partial achievement and no achievement in addition to achievement.

DIUS described the objectives of the change:

- To allow for much earlier publication of data on further education (FE) outcomes, such as college success rates
- Data collection and dissemination timings to be more closely aligned with those in the schools system
- Implementation at the earliest opportunity, ideally for the collection of 2009/10 data.

The potential benefits, as outlined in their business case, are:

- Data on FE and vocational qualifications would be publicly available at a comparable time to data for schools (predominantly on academic qualifications)
- ILR outcomes would be available to similar timescales as Employer Responsive (ER) outcomes
- Enable earlier decision-making on planning and commissioning – by bringing forward critical milestones in the business cycle
- More up-to-date information used by providers and stakeholders such as LSC, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) to monitor and support performance
- Quicker flow of achievements data to providers from Awarding Bodies.

To meet this second request, the piece of work to investigate bringing forward the final return date of F05 to mid-January 2010 for the 2008/09 ILR was extended to include an investigation of the options for delivering outcomes data sooner and the impact that this would have on stakeholders.

Section 5 of this paper describes this work.

### **3.3. *How the final ILR is Used***

The final ILR for each year, F05, is used a number of ways by a range of stakeholders. It is used:

- by a range of stakeholders as the definitive source of participation in FE for the year in question. At a high level it is used to provide final participation figures in a statistical first release (SFR). At an institution level it is used as the definitive source of information about delivery by the LSC and Ofsted
- by the LSC to generate final funding actual amounts by provider and to make appropriate adjustments to payments against allocations and contracts
- by the LSC to generate a provider factor for the year two years beyond that which the data describes. For example final ILR

data for 2007/08 was used to generate the provider factor for 2009/10.

- by the LSC and Ofsted to generate success rates used to inform judgements about the quality of provision and in particular in minimum levels of performance (MLP) and at inspections. Providers use success rates in their self assessments and in advertising material.
- by the LSC in its planning and commissioning processes.

Many of the functions currently undertaken by the LSC will transfer to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) in 2010. Any change to the arrangements for collecting the final ILR needs to take account of the impact of the change on all these stakeholders. In general stakeholders are keen to close the final return earlier as long as to do so does not adversely impact data quality to the extent that it undermines the reliability of the data for the uses to which it is put.

### **3.4. Information about Awarding Bodies**

In 2008/09 FE colleges dealt with around 255 awarding bodies; ninety percent (90%) of enrolments were with just 18 awarding bodies and ninety-eight (98%) were with 51 awarding bodies.

## **4. Closing the final ILR in mid-January 2010**

### **4.1. Methodology**

Once ILR F05 for 2007/08 was complete, the secretariat conducted face to face interviews with institutions to understand their experience of the 6 February close date, and to gather their views on the proposal to bring forward the close date of F05 to 15 January 2010 for the 2008/09 ILR. Four providers volunteered to be interviewed; Henley College, Coventry, Peterborough Regional College, South Downs College, and Warwickshire College. The interviews were structured around a questionnaire framework that was developed for use as an on-line survey.

The secretariat conducted an on-line survey of all providers making learner responsive returns to gain provider feedback on their experience of the 6 February close date and to gather their views on the proposal to bring forward the close date of F05 to 15 January 2010 for the 2008/09 ILR. Eight responses were received.

The interviews and on-line survey were designed to answer two questions;

1. Did bringing the close date of F05 forward to 6 February 2009 for the 2007/08 ILR collection cause any major issues for providers?
2. Did providers foresee any major issues with bringing forward the close date of F05 to 15 January 2010 for the 2008/09 ILR collection?

## **4.2. Results of investigation**

### **4.2.1. Closing F05 for 2007/08 on 6 February 2009**

All of the respondents interviewed and surveyed indicated that they experienced no major issues with the revised close date of 6 February for the 2007/08 ILR.

### **4.2.2. Proposal to close ILR F05 for 2008/09 on 15 January 2010**

All of the respondents interviewed and surveyed, except one, indicated that they would have no issue with bringing the close date of F05 forward to the third Monday in January for the 2008/09 ILR collection.

One college indicated that they would have potential issues due to the overlapping of the F01 and F05 returns in the same processing window. Due to the increased work-load at this time, they foresaw an issue around staff resources and estimated that one extra full-time equivalent person at a cost of £20K would be required for a period to meet the increased workload.

The on-line survey yielded three responses by the date of the deadline<sup>1</sup>. This low return is disappointing and in itself provides insufficient data on which to come to a firm conclusion.

There is further evidence from the face to face interviews together with the on-line survey and other, anecdotal, evidence from conversations with providers and other stakeholders. The secretariat's Standards and Quality Manager has also raised this topic at two conferences attended by representatives from approximately 200 colleges. The feedback received at these conferences supports the view that providers have no major issues with either date.

## **4.3. Summary**

There were no major issues in bringing forward the final close date of ILR F05 for 2007/08 to 6 February 2009 and providers consider there would be no such issues if it were further brought forward to 15 January 2010 for 2008/09.

## **4.4. Conclusion**

The secretariat considers there are no obstacles to bringing forward the final close date of ILR F05 for 2008/09 to 15 January 2010.

# **5. Bringing the Collection of Outcomes Data Much Further Forward**

## **5.1. Methodology**

The employer responsive return is 'hard closed' sometime in the period 7 to 15 November each year. Given that this date is significantly earlier than that for learner responsive returns most of the investigation into this request concentrated on bringing forward the close date of the final learner responsive return, F05, from January/February each year.

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<sup>1</sup> A further five responses were posted after the deadline had expired. They were all of a similar view to those already recorded.

The secretariat investigated the current arrangements implemented by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) for collecting achievements for schools and FE colleges to identify how the FE system could be improved by adopting a similar approach.

The secretariat consulted with key stakeholders using three approaches:

- individual meetings with parties that had a special interest in a particular aspect of the change, for example Ofsted, the Data Service, LSC Funding and Strategic Analysis team
- a workshop for key stakeholders from across the FE community.
- through its online network, **feconnect**, to consult with a wide range of stakeholders.

The secretariat sent regular progress reports to the investigation sponsor, DIUS, and sought feedback from it throughout the project.

## **5.2. Results of investigation**

### **5.2.1. Collecting Achievements in Schools and FE Colleges**

DCSF publish provisional sector, regional and local authority level information on achievement in schools and all FE colleges in the October following the year to which it applies and institution level information in the January. To do this achievement data from the five English Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) awarding bodies and about 45 other vocational awarding bodies is matched to records from the pupil level schools data collection for learners who are deemed to have completed their 16-18 programme. The provisional information is published using matched data that has not been checked by institutions. Once institutions have checked and corrected the matched data it is used to generate institution level information.

The above methodology already results in comparable achievement data for FE colleges and schools being published together in the desired timescale. However the currency of achievement in the FE system is success rates. The matching of data from awarding bodies to participation data in the ILR offers a seemingly attractive route to FE success rates. Some obstacles would need to be overcome before it could be employed:

- the FE qualification cohort for success rates comprises all qualifications planned to end in the whole of the year in question plus all those that actually did complete. This would require matching awarding body data for several years to the ILR
- FE colleges in any one year deliver qualifications awarded by around 255 awarding bodies of which some would be unable to supply achievement data in electronic format, for example because they have manual systems or like professional bodies, do not supply data to colleges. In contrast schools have traditionally dealt with a smaller number of awarding bodies, about 125 of which only about 50 send data for matching as requested by DCSF, covering a narrower range of qualifications

and covering a very high proportion of all qualifications offered. This may be changing with the introduction of the Diploma and Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF)

- the methodology would need to be extended to collect the achievement of apprenticeship frameworks from sector skills councils (SSCs)
- the DCSF system identifies only the cohort of learners and the qualifications which they achieve. Unlike the FE success rate system it does not identify qualifications that have been studied but a learner fails to achieve.

### 5.2.2. Ofsted Views

Ofsted indicated that it had no issue with bringing the final close date of F05 forward. Doing so has benefits as described in the paper written by Ofsted for the Success Rate Harmonisation Steering Group dated 6 March 2009 “A single success rate methodology for the FE system - Myth or a possibility?” Ofsted says that bringing the close date of F05 forward fits well with the success rate harmonisation work.

Ofsted also proposed the following outline schedule for closing F05.

**Table 1 Ofsted Proposed Schedule for Bringing forward the Final Close Date of F05**

Academic year	FE ILR F05 (Hard Close)	ER Period 15 (Hard Close)	Schools QSR data???? (Hard Close)
2008/09	15 Jan 2010	? Nov 2010	N/a
2009/10	? Dec 2010	? Nov 2011	? Nov 2011 (partial return)
2010/11	? Nov 2011	? Nov 2012	? Nov 2012

### 5.2.3. Provider Views on Closing the ILR Much Earlier

The provider workshop considered three options for ‘hard closing’ the final learner responsive ILR at some point in the future. These were:

1. Mid-December
2. Mid-November
3. Mid-October

It then considered the timetable for introducing such a change.

The secretariat facilitated a brainstorming session based on closing the return at each of the three dates to identify whether each was achievable.

The workshop identified opportunities and issues which were then followed up as necessary to clarify any outstanding points.

The constraints identified to hard closing the final ILR at some point in October to December are:

- some smaller awarding bodies regularly deliver results so late that they would not be included
- occasionally a larger awarding body on a one off basis delivers some or all of its results so late that they would not be included. Often this is when a board introduces a new management information system (MIS), moves its offices or goes through an organisational change such as a merger
- providers need to be highly organised in booking external verifiers. If anything impacts these arrangements then results are not available
- providers need to set realistic expected end dates otherwise results are not available. There can be funding pressures to set optimistic end dates
- the exam appeals process can be lengthy so that results are unavailable
- ESOL achievement is calculated by the provider combining results at component level. This is not totally straightforward and delays inputting of results into the ILR. Similar difficulties are anticipated for qualifications in the qualification and credit framework (QCF).
- providers MIS staff are already extremely busy during the autumn period. The use of temporary staff to supplement in-house teams is often a source of data quality issues since almost all roles are skilled

The view of provider workshop attendees and others contributing to the consultation was that as the return date is brought forward from mid-December through to mid-October the delivery of complete and accurate outcome data becomes increasingly difficult because of the reasons described above. It was the view of some providers with a strong record of providing accurate and complete ILR data on a regular basis that delivery in the fourth week of November is achievable but delivery earlier would inevitably lead to increasingly incomplete and inaccurate data. All providers stressed that they were completely dependent on awarding bodies for outcome data and that its availability could vary year on year. These concerns have been reflected in consultation and by colleges attending conferences where the investigation has been described.

### **5.3. Impact Assessment**

#### **5.3.1. The Data Service**

The Data Service's view was that it had no issue with any proposed date providing the quality of data remains unaffected.

The key issue for it is not about time; it is about how the additional resource required to meet any earlier date is sourced and, more importantly, funded. This is because the processing window is already very congested at this time (November) due to the number of concurrent - F01, F04, F05, and W13 - returns that have to be collected and processed.

The Data Service also stressed the importance of being in a position to start work on the data as soon as it arrives because it would be looked on unfavourably by providers if they were to be put under additional pressure to meet an earlier close date for F05 if nothing was then done with the data once it had been sent. This relates to having the success rate methodology available to produce the reports that are based on it.

The Data Service was commissioned by the secretariat to produce an impact assessment of this change. A high level estimate of the cost of making the change for November 2009 is six staff for three months at a cost of £160,000 plus the cost of system changes. System costs have not been calculated since there was insufficient time and there would be a charge for doing so. The change for November 2010 could be delivered mostly using existing staff since it could be planned into the Data Service work plan.

#### **5.3.2. LSC Funding and Strategic Analysis Team**

Bringing forward the close date of F05 to November on its own would not present the team with any issues. However, the critical matter is whether there is a requirement for all associated reports and supporting definitions/ processes/ methodologies to be similarly brought forward. If this is the case then, depending on when it is proposed to implement the change, the following concerns were raised.

- Implementing the change for the 2008/09 ILR raises the issue of the short lead time that this will give to make changes in processes and projects that are already underway - and therefore the consequence that this will need greater levels of expert resource.
- As the success rate methodology needs to be changed significantly for 2008/09 to reflect the new funding methodology, currently planned for publication in October 2009, it is very likely that there will be issues that may introduce further delays into the system together with potentially degrading the quality of data/ information.
- What is unknown is the knock-on effect on business requirements for reporting.

- It is extremely important that the quality and integrity of success rate data is as high, robust and reliable as possible. Everything must be done to avoid any action that may compromise the quality of success rate information.

The Funding and Strategic Analysis team has been commissioned by *the information authority* secretariat to produce an impact assessment of this change. The assessment is due by the end of May and will be reported verbally to the board.

### **5.3.3. Impact on Success Rates**

Bringing forward the close of the final ILR could have an impact on success rates because it could drive changed provider behaviour, for example in terms of setting planned end dates. The impact could be for a transitional year or long-term. No attempt has been made to assess this impact.

### **5.3.4. Closing final ILR for 2008/09 in the Period October to December 2009**

Providers considered that they would have insufficient time to prepare for a change to a much earlier final return date for 2008/09 in autumn 2009 because:

- they need to set realistic learning planned end dates in the light of a much earlier close. These dates can be set only at the beginning of learning and cannot be changed subsequently. Most planned end dates for 2008/09 are already set
- they have insufficient time to prepare and deliver to revised plans in the autumn and to recruit and train any new staff required to deliver them
- awarding bodies have insufficient time to adjust delivery of outcomes to meet this timetable where this is necessary.

The impact assessments identified that even with an immediate decision and much extra resource there is a high risk that success rates to individual providers cannot be reliably delivered by late November 2009. Since this is one of the objectives of the change and one that has benefits for providers it would be difficult to justify an earlier collection at expense to the providers that failed to deliver benefits to them. Publication of success rates in an SFR would not be earlier than about six working weeks after the close of the final ILR.

### **5.3.5. Closing final ILR for 2009/10 in the Period October to December 2009**

Providers considered that if a decision was made promptly and arrangements confirmed to them and awarding bodies shortly afterwards implementation of a final close of the 2009/10 ILR on the fourth Monday in November, 22 November 2010, would be achievable with some risks. These are the performance of awarding bodies in returning timely results and providers in setting realistic planned end dates.

To mitigate these risks it is proposed that:

- awarding bodies are informed of the new arrangements and asked to support providers by making timely transfer of results to them
- providers are asked to set realistic planned end dates in the light of the new timetable
- the board establishes a group to monitor the performance of awarding bodies in sending timely results and identify issues for providers. The group would meet, mostly by email and teleconference, from Summer 2010 through Autumn 2010 to identify issues likely to affect the quality of final ILR data for 2009/10. The group would be authorised to set back the return date if it considered this was necessary to ensure accurate final ILR data. Clear governance and escalation processes would be required.
- the Data Service is asked to plan on the basis that it may be necessary to delay the final return date possibly at short notice.

#### **5.4. Summary**

Implementation of a final close date on the fourth Monday of November in 2010 would be achievable for 2009/10 with risks for which mitigation is proposed in section 5.3.5. Implementation in November 2009 for 2008/09 would represent a high risk strategy.

The secretariat considers implementation of a final close date on the fourth Monday of November in 2010 would be achievable for 2009/10

## **6. Overall Recommendations**

**Based on the results of the investigations into bringing forward the close date of the final ILR for 2008/09 to mid-January 2010 and the investigation into bringing much further forward the collection of outcomes data the secretariat recommends the board agrees to:**

- **confirm the hard close date for the final ILR for 2008/09 as 15 January 2010 with a view to publishing the success rates in the March 2010 SFR**
- **set the hard close date for the final ILR for 2009/10 as the fourth Monday in November 2010, that is 22 November 2010, subject to:**
  - **the board establishing a sub-group to monitor any issues arising during summer and autumn 2010. This sub-group to have the authority to agree a new later final close date in the light of experience**
  - **the secretariat informing providers by 30 June 2009 of the new arrangement and the need to set realistic end dates in the light of this new arrangement**

- **the secretariat informing awarding bodies by 31 July 2009 of the new timetable and the importance of delivering results to providers in sufficient time for them to meet this new timetable.**

The arrangement for 2009/10 would be with a view to making definitive success rate data available in late January 2011. It would be necessary to reschedule SFRs if publication was to be before March 2011.

### **Contact Details**

Creator:	Peter Ashton
Job Title:	Standards and Quality Manager
Organisation:	<i>the information authority</i>
E-mail address:	<a href="mailto:peter.ashton@theia.org.uk">peter.ashton@theia.org.uk</a>
Phone Number:	02476 823710