

Paper 9 - ILR review

Date of issue	22 September 2009
Audience	<i>The information authority board</i>
Publication intent	PUBLIC DOCUMENT

Background and introduction

- 1 *The information authority* secretariat was asked by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to undertake a broad review of the individualised learner record (ILR) to establish how well the ILR is meeting the needs of the department. The ILR is the primary learner data collection in the further education and training (FE) system.
- 2 BIS has responded to the original recommendations. The full report was sent to *the information authority board* in August 2009.

Purpose

- 3 The purpose of this paper is to summarise the main points found in the ILR review and the recommendations for further work relating to the ILR.

Recommendations

- 4 **The board is asked to support the recommendations for further ILR related work.** These are as follows:

Learner data strategy

- 5 A learner data strategy should be developed outlining what data is required for further education and training for the foreseeable future and how it might be delivered over a period of time. Delivery mechanisms would include the ILR and inform developments such as the settlement system. This strategy would build on work already completed or being progressed by organisations such as *the information authority*.
- 6 The scope, terms of reference and governance arrangements for development of a learner data strategy are expected to be agreed in early October.

- 7 The components of the data strategy are expected to include:
- A data model for the ILR – to enable a more structured ILR with a streamlined collection and the removal of unnecessary data elements
 - Confirmation of the ILR purpose and collection criteria
 - Agreed alternative methods of collecting data including decision making criteria for choosing the most appropriate type of data collection for a new requirement
 - Agreed data matching options for example to support tracking of individual outcomes
 - A definition of how MIAP can support data collection within the sector as the Unique Learner Number and the Learner Record become more established
 - Quality standards

Some of these elements such as the data model are already underway – see Appendix A for more information.

Single ILR specification

- 8 *The information authority* should work with the Data Service, the LSC (and its successors), other data users and providers on developing a single, combined ILR specification for all types of provision. This would significantly reduce the complexity of the specification and require fewer compromises when specifying new requirements. The move to a single specification would require a longer planning period than annual ILR changes so implementation could be no earlier than 2011/12.
- 9 In parallel with the single specification, a revised ILR collection timetable should be developed which allows for monthly MI on employer responsive provision but less frequent supply of information on other types of provision.

Use of existing ILR data and data fields

- 10 The ILR is a rich data set and there may be ways of exploiting the information held more effectively rather than collecting additional data to inform new policies. It is recommended that as part of the design of data requirements for a new policy that consideration is given to this option. *The information authority* with the support of the Data Service will build this into its advice for policy makers.
- 11 Further investigation is required into ways to improve data use. Possible options could include an extra step in policy development to consider data requirements and additional training for analysts to enable full exploitation of the ILR datasets.

Key points/issues

- 12 The key findings of the ILR review were as follows:

Original purpose of the ILR

- 13 The ILR was originally designed to collect data to ensure that public money is being spent in line with government targets for quality and value-for-money, for planning, and to make the case for the sector in seeking further funding.
- 14 These needs continue to be met satisfactorily although with some compromise. For example, responsiveness to new demands requires a trade off against data quality.

Current requirements of the ILR

- 15 The main requirements are for data on learner characteristics, participation and achievement. This is used to trigger funding for providers, monitor provider performance, and fulfil equality and diversity monitoring. The ILR provides data to a good standard for participation, achievement and most learner characteristics.
- 16 A newer requirement is to monitor the impact of interventions and qualifications on an individual's (or type of learner's) life course. This involves prior achievement and employment related data. Providers are generally good at recording data about processes under their control. However, there are significant operational issues for providers in obtaining good quality information on learners before or after the learning period. This means that the ILR is not a good method of collecting information on employment, prior achievement, or progression.

Format of the ILR

- 17 An ILR return is not a simple extract from a provider's management information system. Providers have to apply considerable time and effort to ensure a good quality return. Issues can arise when matching ILR data to operational management information, if common and agreed data standards and definitions are not used consistently within the MI system.
- 18 There is now a requirement to undertake a systematic overhaul of the ILR to ensure that:
 - the data structure is coherent
 - only core data is collected
 - consideration is given to the availability of data from other sources including exploitation of the Unique Learner Number.

ILR collections and timing

- 19 There appear to be a number of advantages in moving to one ILR specification for all types of provision. This would reduce complexity and make it easier to manage data on learners moving from one type of provision to another, and to introduce new funding programmes.
- 20 There is a strong need for monthly management information (MI) on employer responsive (ER) provision and no desire to increase the burden by introducing more frequent collection of data for other provision. Options for maintaining a different frequency of data returns for different types of provision should be explored even within one specification.

Data quality

- 21 The quality of ILR data is sufficient to deliver the original purpose of the ILR. Progress has also been made in collecting prior attainment data in recent years to support tracking of targets for full level 2 and 3 qualifications. Generally however, the ILR is weak at collecting progression and employment related data as these rely on information outside the period of learning.
- 22 Specific data quality issues are being addressed by *the information authority* in conjunction with the Data Service and the LSC starting with the quality of ILR data for 2009/10. Initiatives include additional support for providers such as training, improved documentation and access to expert help when required, and for data users, quality statements on Data Service reports.

Changes to the ILR

- 23 The current lead time for ILR changes (eight months from data specification to implementation) is set at the minimum necessary to protect data quality and contain costs across the FE system e.g. in giving sufficient time for IT system changes.
- 24 There should be more visibility of the expected difficulty of implementation or estimated costs for proposed ILR changes to inform decisions by *the information authority* board.

Alternatives to the ILR

- 25 When data is collected for pilots or short term programmes, common data standards and definitions should be used to enable matching to ILR data or later integration into the ILR. Data requirements should be planned at an early stage to ensure efficiency.
- 26 Destination data can be collected most effectively through surveys. Prior attainment data might in time be collected more effectively by data matching with the MIAP learner record. Overall progression can also be tracked using information in the Labour Force Survey.
- 27 The impact of the proposed settlement system on collection of funding data will need to be assessed, and the consequent implications for the ILR.

Implications for the FE sector

- 28 The proposals in this paper have not been validated with significant groups within further education and training. These include data users such as Ofsted and DCSF, and data providers. Consultation on individual proposals will therefore form an important part of next steps.

Next steps

29 Subject to the support of *the information authority* board, key next steps are to:

- agree the scope, terms of reference and governance of a learner data strategy
- start wider discussion and consultation on a move to a single ILR specification

(A draft plan for all the recommendations is attached at Appendix A.)

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Date created	17 September 2009
Document ref.	G:\Organisational Data\Information Authority\IA Board\Actions Papers and Minutes\2009\September 2009\the information authority-paper9-ilrreview-publicpaper-22sep2009.doc
Version	Final

Appendix A

ILR Review Key recommendations and action plan summary

Recommendation /activity	Status	Target date for completion	Comment
1.0 Development of a Learner Data Strategy	To be planned		Terms of reference, governance and scope to be determined – meeting early October
1.1 Data Model for the ILR	Work in progress	9 October 2009	First cut – dependency for single specification
1.2 Purpose of ILR and collection criteria	To be planned	December 2009	
1.4 Alternative methods of collecting data including decision making criteria	To be started	March 2010	
1.5 Data matching options (to support tracking of individual outcomes)	Work in progress		BIS, HMRC and DWP are considering options for matching employment data
1.6 Definition of how MIAP can support data collection	To be started		Dependent upon Learner Data Strategy (1.0)
1.7 Quality Standards	Work in progress	January 2010	Quality standards implemented for 2009/10 – to be reviewed for 2010/11.
2.0 Single ILR specification	To be planned	2011/12	This is a significant change that requires widespread consultation and significant lead time.
3.0 Use of existing ILR data and data fields	Work in progress	December 2009	Discussions to be had with BIS and DCSF analysts.