

# Minutes

<b>Date</b>	8 December 2011
<b>Subject</b>	ER Provider Group Meeting
<b>Location</b>	Cheylesmore House, Coventry
<b>Time</b>	10:30am-3:30pm
<b>Publication intent</b>	PUBLIC DOCUMENT

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## Item 1. Welcome and introductions

## Item 2. Data Service software / systems

- 2.1 Alan Billingham, the Data Service's Production and Quality Director, began by apologising to the group for the delays in getting the 2011/12 data collection tools and systems ready. He thanked providers for their tolerance. He acknowledged that they had not produced the quality of systems that they had originally intended
- 2.2 He informed the group that there would be a second release of the Learner Information Suite in January 2012. The reason for the second release is to provide a Skills Funding Agency shadow funding calculation facility and to fix outstanding bugs in the software.
- 2.3 Release two of the Learning Aim Reference Application (LARA) has been cancelled. Release one gives the core functionality required by the sector. Release two was intended to enable aims to be updated far more systematically. Release two was due to introduce transparency so that providers could see where particular aims were in the process of being approved for funding. It has not been possible to deliver this functionality and so the Data Service is now looking again at its system architecture to see what is achievable.
- 2.4 The group commented that the search function in LARA is not as good as it used to be in the LAD. They also had some feedback on ways that the new screen layout could be amended to help users. Alan said that they plan to release LARA 1.1 and so he would welcome feedback and ideas from the group.

**Action: The Data Service to look at gathering suggestions from providers ahead of the release of LARA 1.1**

- 2.5 Alan had good news to report regarding the R04 data return. Almost 1,200 providers returned data. The data collection / processing systems proved to be robust. Some group members commented that they had noticed a significant improvement in the processing times of R04 files when compared to their experience of R03.
- 2.6 There was some discussion about the processing of files outside office hours. Providers want the option of getting files processed after 6pm and over weekends if possible.

**Action: Paul to feed this back to the Data Service and seek clarification on what the current arrangements for processing files are and why the timings are limited.**

- 2.7 Group members commented that there continue to be problems created by the online data collection system (OLDC) reporting errors that are not identified in the LIS. Examples being spaces in postcodes, the use of upper/lower case letters in outcome grades and the use of some special characters, such as apostrophes. It was pointed out that this not only adds to the burden for learning providers, it also causes unnecessary strain on OLDC because huge files have to be resubmitted.

### **Item 3. Prior Attainment data**

- 3.1 Robin MacNeill, Ana Cavilla and Bob Butcher from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) attended this part of the meeting to discuss discrepancies between prior attainment data reported in the ILR and that collected via BIS's Prior Qualification Survey.
- 3.2 Robin gave a brief presentation to introduce the issues that BIS wanted to discuss with the group. Further details are in the presentation slides.
- 3.3 The group were confident that the information reported in their data returns was correct. They usually see certificates or some sort of evidence of previous achievements. Many sector skills councils make clear that providers must see certificates for previous qualifications.
- 3.4 A number of possible reasons were suggested by the group for reasons why there could be a discrepancy. These included:
  - Funding implications – learners may claim not to have some qualifications if it means their forthcoming training will be free.
  - Relevance of qualifications – the learner may choose only to disclose qualifications that they think is relevant to this episode of learning.
  - Learners may mislead providers and / or employers – some are embarrassed about their lack of qualifications and so claim to have many more qualifications.
  - The qualifications are old – learners might not remember what qualifications they gained twenty years ago.
  - Foreign qualifications – these can be difficult to assess and subscriptions to services to compare overseas qualifications can be prohibitive.
- 3.5 Mike Wicks informed the group that the Data Service is looking into the feasibility of creating a prior qualification calculator that would take

information from the learner's Personal Learning Record and calculate what level their prior attainment was. The group felt this would be very beneficial to the sector.

- 3.6 There was a discussion about how prior attainment information is collected. Ahead of the meeting, Robin had circulated a possible prior attainment data collection form for the group to comment on. The group's feedback was that many providers will collect more detailed information than was on the draft form. For example, as well as the qualification, some providers record the year of achievement and the awarding organisation. It was also highlighted that the language used on data collection forms for learners must be kept basic so that all learners can understand what is being asked for.
- 3.7 Robin thanked the group for their input and said that he would like an opportunity to talk with individual providers in a little more detail about the collection of data and what they might be able to do to help improve the quality of returns against the background described.

**Action: Group members – if you would like to discuss this further with BIS colleagues or have any further comments to make, please email [robin.macneill@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:robin.macneill@bis.gsi.gov.uk)**

#### **Item 4. ILR issues and 2012/13 changes**

- 4.1 Lisa Macdougall from *the information authority* fielded any questions regarding the 2011/12 ILR. There was a query on whether independent training providers could deliver classroom learning. Lisa's understanding is that they can, but if the provider has not previously had an LR contract, the data collection systems cannot process the data. Lisa explained that there is guidance on how to code these learners. It is in the Adult Skills Classroom Based Learning Guidance for Private Training Providers which is published on *the information authority's* website at: [http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/ilrdocuments/201112\\_guidance.htm](http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/ilrdocuments/201112_guidance.htm)
- 4.2 Some providers commented that they had no information on their Provider Funding Reports regarding some provision they are delivering for the unemployed. In those circumstances, Lisa recommended that providers speak to their Skills Funding Agency account manager.
- 4.3 For some provision, there are significant discrepancies between funding rates for ER and ALR. This has been raised with funding policy colleagues in the Skills Funding Agency, but the feedback has been that they do not intend to change the rates. It was suggested that providers may wish to lobby their representative organisations, such as the AELP and AoC, to take this up with the Agency.
- 4.4 Lisa gave a presentation on the ILR changes for 2012/13. Further details are available in the presentation slides. Most of the discussion was on the learner employment status fields which have changed significantly. There was a query regarding how volunteers fit into this, whether they are eligible for funding and whether an employer number would be needed for them. Lisa was aware of some guidance on volunteers and agreed to point the group to that. **Post meeting update:** the Skills Funding Agency's Nick Chomyk confirmed that volunteers are funded through classroom learning.

4.5 Some group members identified recent changes to learner eligibility as causing confusion and burden. Historically providers could just clarify that the learner had been in the UK for three years. It seems to be more complex now. It was suggested that a flowchart to help providers identify whether a learner is eligible would be very useful.

**Action: Paul to raise this with Nick Chomyk.**

4.6 There was also a discussion about how the Outcome Incentive Payments were being paid. Some group members perceived that OIPs are being paid automatically this year as a percentage of their allocation, whereas others are being asked to claim. **Post meeting update:** the OIPs guidance for 2011/12 is published in paragraphs 120 to 131 of the 2011/12 Adult Skills Budget Funding Requirements document, which can be downloaded at: <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/fundingdocuments/> In short, colleges are paid from within their allocation – no additional claims are required. Private training providers use the TPS to claim 2.5% of their monthly allocation. All providers are asked to record job outcomes in the Employment Outcome field in the ILR.

4.7 There was a discussion about changes that have been made to the Provider Funding Reports this year. This same issue has been raised at these meetings in previous years. Providers are the key users of these reports, yet they have very little influence on their format.

## **Item 5. The Course Directory**

5.1 Paul Kelman informed the group that the Skills Funding Agency has asked *the information authority* to take ownership of the data specification for the Course Directory from 2012/13. The Data Service will be responsible for collecting this data from August 2012.

5.2 Paul said that *the information authority's* approach would be to have a transparent data governance process, just as there is for the ILR. The long term intention is to develop and / or adopt data standards for course information, so that one dataset would meet the needs of the Course Directory, Common Application Processes for young people and course aggregators such as Hotcourses. One of the standards that will be looked at are the eXchanging Course Related Information (XCRI) standards. <http://www.xcri.co.uk/>

5.3 One current frustration is that providers must update quarterly, even if there is no new information to add.

5.4 Due to time and resource pressures, it is likely that there will be minimal change for 2012/13. Paul reassured the group that they, along with others in the sector, will be consulted on this in the near future.

## **Item 6. Funding Simplification**

6.1 Graham Brough from the Skills Funding Agency spoke to the group about four strands of simplification activity which the Agency has been asked to lead on. These are:

1. Reducing bureaucracy for large employers delivering apprenticeships – this will see a pilot where employers will be paid on outcomes only, with fewer data collection / audit requirements.
  2. Simplification of the funding system – this includes reducing the number of budget lines, reducing the number of funding rates and removing other burdens.
  3. The Whole Provider View – working with colleges (and private training providers in due course) to look at the Agency's relationship with learning providers. The aim is to identify and remove any remaining bureaucratic burdens.
  4. Communications with the sector – the Agency aims to reduce the amount of communications it issues and improve the overall quality. The agency acknowledges that it is challenging for learning providers to keep on top of everything that is currently sent to them.
- 6.2 Although there was limited time, the group had several suggestions for Graham. Particularly around the wording and format of guidance documents. They also cited an example of bureaucracy where the Agency asks providers to return copies of PFRs for their year end returns. The point being that the PFR originates from the Agency and so why should providers send the Agency a copy of a document that came from them in the first place.
- 6.3 It was agreed that Graham would attend the next group meeting to feed back on developments. Graham also expressed an interest in possibly involving a few members of the group on specific pieces of simplification work.

**Action: Paul to discuss with Graham ways that the group could contribute to the simplification work and also invite Graham to the next meeting.**

### **Item 7. Using EDRS – group discussion**

- 7.1 Chris Shaw from the Data Service explained that he is responsible for the Employer Data Registration Service, although the system is operated by Bluesheep. There was a brief discussion about why the EDRS was set up and how the current use seems to have moved away from that. As a result, there are some functions of the system that learning providers query the purpose of and some changes that could be made to improve their experience of using the system.
- 7.2 There was mixed feedback on the Bluesheep system. Some group members have had very positive experiences, an example being a high number of new employer numbers being returned within a couple of days of submission, even though it was during a busy period in the run up to an ILR closing date. Some others have had less positive experiences and want the system to better reflect the needs of learning providers.
- 7.3 It was agreed that suggestions and feedback from the group would be documented and passed on to Chris to look into and report back on at the next meeting. The following issues were identified at the meeting:
1. When adding an employer, if the employer is not approved within two weeks, the information input by the learning provider disappears and the provider has to re-input all of the data.

2. When new employers are contacted confirm their company's details, it was suggested that the caller makes clear they are calling "on behalf of the Skills Funding Agency".
3. There is a flag to show that employers have over 5,000 learners. It would be more helpful to the sector if this was 1,000. It would also be helpful to have a Small / Medium sized enterprise.
4. Guidance on what an alias record is would be helpful. Some learning providers are unclear whether an alias record can be used or, if they find an alias, how they can tell which number to use.
5. Is it possible to see the Employer Number without entering a contact number?

**Action: All group members if you have any further comments or amendments to the above, please email [paul.kelman@theia.org.uk](mailto:paul.kelman@theia.org.uk) by the end of January 2012.**

### **Item 8. Apprenticeship NSR tables**

- 8.1 Nick Graham and Stephen Wood spoke to the group about plans to develop National Success Rate Tables for Apprenticeship provision. The presentation slides have further information. Nick confirmed that the intention is that these will be put in the public domain via the MI library. The tables will use 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 ILR data. They would like to include timely success rates, but are wary that the statistics need to reconcile with the Statistical First Release.

### **Item 9. Any other business**

- 9.1 There was a brief discussion about possible future agenda items. It was agreed that Ofsted would be invited to the next meeting. Suggestions for other included the [JCQ's A2C project](http://a2c.jcq.org.uk/) (<http://a2c.jcq.org.uk/>) and a discussion on the use of DSATs later in the year.

### **Item 10. Dates for future meetings**

- 10.1 The next meeting will take place on Thursday 29 March 2012. Dates will be set for meetings in

## Meeting Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Adele Jenkins	First4Skills
Alan Billingham	Data Service
Ana Cavilla	Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills
Bob Butcher	Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills
Chris Shaw	Data Service
Donna MacManus	TQ Training
Graham Brough	Skills Funding Agency
Janet Spencer	Training 2000 Ltd
Jason Gibson	NHS North East
Lee Higgins	Intraining
Lisa Macdougall	<i>The information authority</i>
Liz Hardy	Community Training Services Ltd
Lynn Law	Seetec
Mike Wicks	Data Service
Nick Graham	Data Service
Niki Hollingsworth	Skillspoint
Pat Bee	Warwickshire College
Paul Kelman	<i>The information authority</i>
Paul Rogers	YMCA Training
Paul Taylor	Manchester Solutions
Peter Hancock	Adult Education in Gloucestershire
Ria Lawton	First4Skills
Richard Luke	Toni & Guy
Robin MacNeill	Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills
Sarah Brockbank	Toni & Guy
Stephen Wood	Data Service
Tracy Tennant	Community Training Services Ltd