

ILR Data Quality

1. What are we asking the board to do?

The board is asked to confirm it is content with the work being undertaken by the secretariat and to note the other work.

2. Introduction

The paper describes the project led by *the information authority* secretariat (“the secretariat”) to introduce interim arrangements to underpin the quality of individualised learner record (ILR) data for 2009/10. It also describes data quality work being undertaken by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Data Service.

3. Background

The LSC in years up to and including 2007/08 has adopted a number of approaches to ILR data quality including:

- validation, the systematic application of rules to data at the learner level as it is received, for example identifying as invalid a record for a 33 year-old learner benefiting from funding from 16-18 year-olds
- credibility checking, systematic identification of issues with data at the whole provider level, for example identifying that more than 10% of postcodes are missing in a provider’s data file
- training for providers
- training for LSC staff
- audit to ensure that data sent is consistent with documentation held by the provider.

The secretariat in line with its structure approved by the board is recruiting a Data Quality and Improvement Manager. The purpose of this role is to:

- lead the further education (FE) system in developing and agreeing the quality management policies and assurance standards that will meet the needs of the system for improved quality of data, without imposing substantial increase in data burden
- champion the adoption of these data quality policies and standards across the FE system and to ensure that they are updated to meet the changing needs of FE system stakeholders
- guide and support the Data Service in developing and implementing the quality management and quality assurance processes, procedures and systems that will deliver required quality of data.

A candidate has been appointed to this role and commences on 2 June 2009. In November 2008 the secretariat identified a need to manage actively ILR data quality for 2009/10. Consequently the secretariat established a project to introduce interim arrangements to underpin ILR data quality for 2009/10. Pending recruitment to a permanent position, the secretariat appointed a business analyst with data quality experience to take it forward. The board was informed of the project in the Secretariat Report to the March 2009 meeting.

4. Data quality work

4.1 Interim arrangements for ILR for 2009/10

The interim arrangements are building on the approaches previously used by the LSC by directing them to address the most pressing quality issues identified by data users.

The interim project identified six areas of work by which improved data quality might be secured:

- (i) The overhaul and reissue of a new edition of the ILR Provider Guidance manuals to help provider management information system (MIS) staff prepare data correctly.
- (ii) The delivery of a targeted training programme in order to help provider MIS staff prepare data correctly. It is focusing on: new providers; changes to the 2009/10 specification; and other areas identified by the provider community.
- (iii) The delivery of a central support desk service to providers by the Data Service. This will help providers to prepare ILR data and use information derived from it.
- (iv) The enhancement of the Data Self-assessment Toolkit (DSAT), a quality assurance reporting system used by providers to prepare for audit by Provider Finance Assurance. This will help providers to correct data before it is sent to the Data Service.
- (v) The enhancement of the Data Service's Credibility Reports to reflect the data quality standards published as Appendix P to the 2009/10 ILR Specification. This will make it easier for providers to measure the quality of their data against the published standards.
- (vi) The promotion of a provider-based community of good practice using the feconnect website to allow providers to benefit from the experience of other providers preparing ILR data.

4.2 Other Data Quality Initiatives

Both the LSC and the Data Service are undertaking additional work to address aspects of data quality. These activities, along with the work outlined above, are co-ordinated via a project board on which all three bodies are represented.

The following work is being jointly undertaken aimed at improving overall governance of data quality across the sector:

- The Data Service, with support from *the information authority*, is investigating the setting up of an intelligent customer group as a forum for testing Data Service products, acting as a steering group for new requirements, and data governance. This group should form an overarching forum to incorporate all relevant organisations, with a mind to the evolving landscape.
- *The information authority*, the Data Service and the LSC (and in future the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) are working together to clarify and publish a statement about their respective roles and that of individual providers in improving end-to-end data quality.
- *The information authority* is setting out a clear process and working with the LSC and other partners to establish good practice in the governance of management information (MI) definitions. The LSC, the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) will strive to follow the best practice set out by the secretariat in the governance of definitions and work with policy colleagues to increase their understanding of the impact of policy changes on MI and performance reporting.
- The Data Service & *the information authority* will develop and execute a joint communications strategy for the programme of data quality initiatives.
- Regular reports on data quality, including quality measures for the ILR, will be made to *the information authority* board ("the board") and the Data Service Steering Group (both of which have DIUS representation) jointly by the secretariat and the Data Service.

The LSC is undertaking a number of specific activities to improve data quality, among which are:

- The role of the LSC (and in future the SFA, NAS and the YPLA) is being formally built into the data quality process for MI

production where its specific needs are being met, for example to support funding and allocations.

- The LSC continues to improve its analysis of MI by ensuring closer working between performance and policy teams to interpret the MI.
- The LSC and DIUS are reviewing the gatekeeper arrangements for coordinating MI requests, as part of the Machinery of Government (MoG) Transition plans, to ensure the arrangements are appropriate for the NAS.

The Data Service is undertaking a number of specific activities to improve data quality, among which are:

- The Data Service is adding a “Statement of Quality” to all MI reports to show: coverage and completeness including whether early or full year data; known issues and likely impact; fitness for use; whether for internal or external public use; syntax listing; dataset details; caveats; date-stamp; deviation from statistical first release (SFR); the extent of the quality assurance carried out.
- The Data Service is ensuring prompt communication to its customers of delays or any issues affecting MI delivery.
- The Data Service is developing written “Agreements of Use” with its other customers building on the experience of working with the LSC.
- The LSC and the Data Service are building upon the new quarterly SFR, and the experience gained in apprenticeship reporting, to document how monthly MI and the quarterly SFR should be used, so that all national, regional and partnership teams in the LSC are clear what can be shared with partners, what can be published and the status of the two sorts of information.
- The Data Service is reviewing adherence to the existing LSC strategy for deletion and archiving.
- The Data Service and the secretariat in line with on-going proposed changes to data collection windows, will investigate a reduction in the number of freezes of ILR data and work together to publish an agreed calendar of freezes.

5. FE Sector Implications

ILR data quality is built in by good processes in providers. Improvements to support manuals, training for providers and support desk arrangements will all make it easier for providers to get data correct first time. The changes to the DSAT and credibility reports could result in providers engaging in extra activities. These will however help them to identify data quality issues earlier which if left uncorrected could when identified later be more costly and time consuming to address. The plans have been discussed with the Association of College (AOC) which broadly supports them.

6. Next Steps

The project will continue to deliver the interim arrangements described above.

7. Contact Details

Author: Peter Ashton

Job Title: Standards and Quality Manager

Department/Organisation: *the information authority* secretariat

E-mail address: peter.ashton@theia.org.uk