

Report

Paper 10 – Secretariat Report

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1 What are we asking the board to do?

- 1.1 This paper gives a status update on the work of *the information authority* secretariat. Decisions are required on three items; the remainder of the paper is for information.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This report covers work by the secretariat since the board meeting in December 2009 and that planned before the next meeting in June 2010.

3 Decisions to be taken / items to be noted by the board

The following decisions are required:

3.1 Request to review the process for hard closure of data returns

- 3.1.1 As part of efforts to improve quality *the information authority* introduced a 'hard close' to the final ILR data return (F05), in order to assist Ofsted and the LSC in aligning their success rates reporting and to ensure that timely and complete data was available for all data users.
- 3.1.2 This hard close was implemented successfully for the second year running in January 2010. The overwhelming majority of providers able to comply and most submitted their F05 returns either before or on that date.
- 3.1.3 However, there have been appeals from a handful of providers regarding administrative errors that led to their final reports being inaccurate. There is currently no opportunity to allow for resolution of these errors given that processing of the data begins so promptly after the portal closes.

- 3.1.4 As a result of this, the Skills Funding Agency has asked *the information authority* to recognise the need for a sensible approach to allow for genuine administration oversight, which can be distinguished from deliberate infractions in order to affect the outcome of the return. Accordingly, we have offered to review the process for hard closure of data returns in order to propose amendments that will allow providers that have made administrative errors a 'time window' within which to amend their data submission prior to processing.

The board is asked to support this course of action and to review the proposal drawn up by the secretariat when it meets in June.

3.2 FE Data Management Group

- 3.2.1 The FE Data Management Group was formed in response to an investigation into college individualised learner record (ILR) data undertaken by the LSC and Ofsted, which discovered different data management practices in some colleges which could result in inconsistent reporting.
- 3.2.2 A separate paper will be distributed to the board for consideration and decision at the meeting on 3rd March outlining the purpose of the group, its Terms of Reference and the outcomes of meetings held to date.

The board is asked to note the Terms of Reference for the group, the decisions and progress made by the group and to agree how it would like to work with the FE Data Management Group.

3.3 Late changes for 2010/11 ILR

The secretariat is currently investigating two late change requests for the ILR specification at the request of the Skills Funding Agency. A separate paper will be distributed to the board for consideration and decision at the meeting on 3rd March.

The board is asked to make a decision regarding these two late requests.

The board is asked to note the following items:

3.4 Continuing data collections for the Skills Funding Agency and YPLA

- 3.4.1 At the September 2009 board meeting the secretariat was asked to identify which data collections for the YPLA and Skills Funding Agency are to continue beyond the MoG changes and outline a process for reviewing these collections and establishing *information authority* governance.
- 3.4.2 The secretariat has worked with the Data Service, using their Gap Analysis regarding data collections and reports currently out of their scope to assist in identifying those collections that are currently outside of IA governance.
- 3.4.3 Findings so far will be tabled at this board meeting and the board will be asked to comment on the proposed way forward.

3.5 Progress report

3.5.1 The secretariat has provided a summary of progress since the last board meeting in December, and that planned up until June 2010.

3.6 Work-plan of *the information authority*

3.6.1 The current version of the authority's work-plan is at Appendix B. It provides an up-to-date status on key activities and deliverables as agreed with the board in October 2007 and those identified since.

3.7 *Information authority* performance measurement

3.7.1 A summary of *the information authority's* performance against its assessment criteria is provided at Appendix C for review. The performance against criteria is reviewed twice a year (in March and September) by the board, and the criteria are reviewed annually.

3.8 *information authority* summary performance 'dashboard'

3.8.1 The performance dashboard is at Appendix D – it includes current risks and issues, spend to date, forecast out-turn and **feconnect** and corporate website usage.

4 Further information

The appendices to this report include:

- Progress report and key activities for the period October 2009 to June 2010 (Appendix A)
- *The information authority* work plan (Appendix B)
- Performance measurement six monthly review (Appendix C)
- Dashboard summary report (Appendix D)

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Appendix A

Progress report

Activities for last period (October 2009 – March 2010)

1. Stakeholder engagement

Events held:

- *The information authority* and the Data Service organised and ran a conference entitled “Data in the Wider FE Sector” on 03 December 2010. It was very well received and plans are underway to run a second event.
- Advisory Groups – including software suppliers, learner responsive providers, own software writers, employer responsive providers and data users to address current data issues and clarify any queries regarding the 2010/11 ILR.
- The Head of *the information authority* presented at the AoC examinations officers’ conference on 26th February 2009.
- The Chairman of *the information authority* met with the Chief Executive and Chair of the YPLA on 02 December 2009 to promote understanding of our work.

Publications

- *The information authority* calendar was published and distributed to all providers at the end of December 2009. The calendars included the deadlines for data returns and dates for board meetings and steering group meetings and were very well received by the sector.
- *The information authority*’s second annual report was printed and distributed in November 2009, outlining our achievements and priorities.
- *The information authority* sponsored a one-off ‘Success Rates Newsletter’ for the Data Harmonisation Group to summarise all the progress made in aligning success rates data so far. The newsletter was sent to all providers in December.

Other meetings / contacts:

- New Head of *the information authority* initiating introductory meetings with all board members (still in progress)
- New Head of *the information authority* initiating introductory meetings with key colleagues in LSC / YPLA / SFA (still in progress)
- Learner Data Strategy Board – 28th January
- BIS regular contacts

- Data Harmonisation Group – monthly meetings
- LLUK – regular meeting
- YPLA – establishing regular contacts
- SFA – establishing regular contacts
- React (LGA) – regular contact with group and via YPLA
- Bureaucracy Reduction Group – 25th January
- Data Service – regular contacts including Steering Group
- Various provider visits

Website and community portal

- Feconnect has now moved onto a new platform enabling easier editing, lower running costs and more features for users. A new round of ‘hot seats’ is being organised featuring colleagues from BIS, the Data Service and QCDA.
- The website now has a ‘web alerts’ function and several areas of the site have had major updates, including the Data Burden area, and the Harmonisation of Success Rates area.

2. Secretariat team

- John Perks joined *the information authority* as our new Head of service on the 1st February 2010. John came to us from the Association of Colleges (AoC) where he was the NILTA Manager (Policy and Practice), and prior to that to that he was a college manager. John can be contacted at: john.perks@theia.org.uk
- Our team administrator and PA to the head of service, Helen Karabatos, left recently to take up a post in the YPLA. David Matthews has joined us temporarily to perform this role and we are planning to recruit for a permanent replacement soon. David can be contacted at: david.matthews@theia.org.uk
- Our Data Quality Manager, Adele Dixon left at the end of January to take up a post in the YPLA. Peter Millard is picking up the overview and high priority areas of this work until a new DQ Manager is appointed. The recruitment process is underway.

3. Quality and standards

- The validation rules for 2010/11 have now been completed and associated guidance published on 29th January 2010.
- The calendar for the change request process for 2011/12 has been published on the corporate website.
- Improvements to the ILR change process have been put into place, including the establishment of a ‘review panel’ (taking place in July) to give early feedback on change requests prior to them being put out for wider consultation.
- Two meetings of the ‘FE Data Management Group’ have now been held. The group is chaired by Graham Jones and attended by college representatives, the YPLA, the SFA, AoC, ALP and HOLEX. The group was set up to address the data management issues highlighted in Geoff Russell’s letter of the 23rd September 2009.

- Data Quality Workshop / Data Quality Board

The information authority convened a workshop on data quality on February 2010 to identify the key data quality issues for data users. The Data Quality Project board, chaired by the head of the information authority secretariat meets monthly to monitor the data quality tasks. In the light of MoG changes its membership will be reconstituted.

4. Governance

- The six monthly performance measurement review is included in this report and can be found at Appendix C.

5. Budget

- Spend to date and forecast for this year (2009/10) is summarised at Appendix D. (To follow)

6. Work in progress

- Key risks and issues for *the information authority's* work are also listed in Appendix D.

Activities planned for next period (March 2010 – June 2010)

7. Stakeholder engagement

- The Chairman of *the information authority* is to meet with the Head of the Skills Funding Agency once in post to promote understanding of our work. (TBA)
- Promotion of the ILR Change Request engagement / consultation process for 2011/12
- Publication and promotion of board decisions taken in March.
- Continued contributions to stakeholder newsletters – including AoC, ALP, the DSP bulletin issued by the DCSF and FE News distributed by BIS.
- *The information authority* plans to jointly sponsor the of the AoC Nilta CIS conference in June 2010.
- Plans are underway to hold another joint Data Conference for our stakeholders later this year.
- We will join and attend partner events and wider groups (for example the Bureaucracy Reduction Group) to ensure that *the information authority* continues to widen its influence.

8. Secretariat team

- A team planning session is being held, which will take place after the general election and which will focus on our future work. Outputs from this day will be shared with the board at its meeting in June, and board members will be asked to contribute their views and ideas to help us in planning our work over the next year.

9. Quality and Standards

- Standards advice and support will continue to be provided to various FE initiatives.
- Continued contribution to working groups of the Information Standards Board.
- Work to publish the ILR support manuals for 2011/12 by the end of March 2009 continues.
- Membership of the F05 Sub-Group has now been finalised and a meeting is being planned for mid-May to advise the authority on the impact of moving forward the F05 collection dates.
- The team will continue to lead the project to develop a learner data strategy. KPMG will deliver the final report by 31 March. It is to be discussed at the project board on 12 April 2010.

10. Governance

- Work will continue on embedding governance arrangements and working practices between *the information authority* and the Data Service.
- The secretariat will continue to take an active role in the Data Harmonisation Group regarding its work around aligning and simplifying success rates, and take forward proposals for *the information authority* to take ownership of the group post-MoG.

Appendix B –

The *information authority* – workplan

The current workplan for *the information authority* can be summarised as follows:

1. Address data burden

– Following the study into provider data burden by Oakleigh Consulting published in June 2008, work with organisations to address the issues raised. Specifically:

- Continue to manage a process for reporting and investigating unscheduled data requests made to providers and working with the LSC to increase understanding and reducing data requests.
- Review the LSC's progress in piloting the implementation of electronic learner records and support efforts to continue this work post-MoG.
- Support the production of simpler funding guidance documentation by the SFA and YPLA for 2010/11
- Support the work of the Information Standards Board in developing common standards for awarding data.
- Agree governance arrangements for collections by Connexions offices. A data-set was agreed in December, however, requirements have changed since then and this area of work is being reviewed. A progress paper will be submitted to the March 2010 board meeting.
- Review success of provider support arrangements for 2009/10 and plan further improvements for 2010/11.
- Provide a comprehensive report for BIS, the BRG and *the information authority* board regarding all work completed on data burden work-streams by Mid-May 2010.

2. Set data standards and quality

- Publish data standards for all sections of the ILR in the specification for 2010/11.
- Develop and promote the implementation of a data standards framework for further education and training.
- Develop and promote the implementation of a data quality standards framework for FE data.
- Deliver in conjunction with the Data Service and the LSC (and its successors) a programme of data quality improvements.
- Review the ILR collection dates, freezes and windows for all collections for 2010/11 and publish the calendar by November 2009.
- Support the governance and publication of derived variables for learner related data used within further education and training.
- Support the development of a learner data strategy for FE in conjunction with BIS, DCSF, SFA, YPLA and the Data Service by March 2010 to inform the development of the ILR, the settlement system and the MIAP learner record.

- Align FE, schools and HE data definitions and standards through ongoing dialogue and collaboration including through the Information Standards Board. Specifically:
 - Support the development of other standards relevant to FE e.g. learner record
- Harmonise success rate reporting. Specifically:
 - Proposals for *the information authority* to take over ownership of this group post-MoG so that important work in this area can continue.
- Review and agree proposed FE system collections, specifically:
 - LLUK's Staff Individualised Record 2010/11 (March 2010)
 - Framework for Excellence – Future phases (March 2010)
- Support the development of key sector initiatives e.g.
 - Qualifications and Credit Framework
 - Settlement system

3. Data collection and analysis

- A transparent process for changes has been implemented. This will be reviewed and improved on an ongoing basis.
- Reference material to be included for all fields in the ILR specification for 2010/11 onwards detailing how data is used.
- Removal of data duplication – further fields to be proposed for removal in 2010/11
- Data model for the ILR specification to be developed to enable further rationalisation for 2011/12, a move to a single ILR for all types of provision and the potential implementation of a XML format. (Implementation is dependent on the learner data strategy).
- Ongoing management of the ILR specification annual cycle including a review of the specification timetable for 2011/12.

4. Data reporting

- In conjunction with the LSC, its successors and the Data Service, data quality reporting issues to be assessed and prioritised for improvement.
- Continue work with the LSC, its successors, the Data Service, HESA and HEFCE to improve the reporting of FE data in HE and vice versa.

5. Data Service support

- Provide requirements, data standards etc. in a timely fashion to the Data Service for data collection, analysis and reporting.
- Participate in Data Service governance arrangements – providing direction, support and scrutiny as required.
- Undertake joint projects with the Data Service to drive improvements in FE data collection, transformation and reporting.

6. Communication and engagement

- Stakeholder engagement to identify required improvements in data collection / reporting etc, and consult on proposed changes. This is an ongoing process and includes stakeholders throughout the FE system as well as those in HE and schools as appropriate.
- Manage the communication of the changes to the final learner responsive collection close date for 2009/10 and operate an advisory sub-group.
- Review of stakeholder engagement including board membership to reflect Machinery of Government changes and closer alignment of employment and skills agenda.
 - Specifically to determine how best to engage with local authorities, the YPLA and the SFA to ensure effective governance of data requirements
- Produce annual report for ministers / stakeholders by October 2010.
- Revise communications strategy and plan for review by board in December 2010.
- Further development of community forum and website to support stakeholder consultation, sharing of best practice etc.
- Review infrastructure supporting community forum to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency.

7. Performance management of *the information authority*

- Manage *the information authority* against performance criteria agreed annually by *the information authority* board.
- Publish the second annual benefits report by April 2010.

8. Secretariat Support

- Continue to provide secretariat support to the *information authority* board.
- Provide support for other groups such as the FE Data Management Group.

Appendix C

The *information authority* – detailed performance criteria

The performance criteria for *the information authority* (covering both the board and the secretariat) are described below. Performance against the criteria will be reviewed twice a year (in March and September) by the board, and the criteria will be reviewed annually.

2. Criteria and performance

2.1 Develop a transparent process for data changes

The *information authority* secretariat will:

- Publish a clear and transparent process for data changes
- Specify unambiguous assessment criteria for changes
- Support stakeholders in the development of business cases for changes
- Provide a variety of mechanisms for debating and challenging proposed changes. (These will include face to face groups and online communities)
- Present balanced recommendations on proposed changes to *the information authority* board.

The *information authority* board will:

- Take transparent decisions on change requests based on balancing provider burden versus the provision of useful information for providers and data users

Measures and **performance**:

- The publication of an agreed data change process, ILR change timetable for 2009/10, and change assessment criteria by 31st March 2008. **Complete for 2009/10 and 2010/11. An appeals process has been agreed and published. The change process for 2011/12 is now underway.**
- Publication of board papers showing how decisions were reached. **Complete / ongoing.**
- The delivery of ongoing improvements in processes as agreed with stakeholders. **Following further feedback from stakeholders, changes were agreed to the 2011/2012 ILR change process, which is in the process of being implemented now.**
- Feedback from stakeholders on support and communication mechanisms. **The communications strategy for 2009/2010 has been agreed by the board establishing our communications priorities and targets for the coming year.**

2.2 Agree clear standards for FE data with alignment between schools and HE

The *information authority* will:

- Set and communicate clear standards for FE data ensuring these are available to all interested parties
- Adopt any common data standards wherever possible

- Resolve any potential conflicts with HE and / or schools. In the first instance resolution will be through the appropriate body (HESA or the Schools Star Chamber), or if necessary via the Information Standards Board (ISB)
- Participate fully with the ISB, as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding between the two bodies

Measures and performance:

- Publication of data standards on *the information authority* website with links to other standards where appropriate. **ILR standards published and improved; more work to be done on linking to other standards.**
- Adoption of agreed data standards by the Data Service, and increasing uptake by other users in the FE system **In progress.**
- Feedback from stakeholder groups including the ISB, HESA and the Schools Star Chamber on collaborative working enabling the adoption of common standards, and on the clarity / usefulness of standards. **Good working relationships in place with these groups. Memorandum of Understanding with the Schools Star Chamber is now also in place.**

2.3 Develop effective and wide engagement with stakeholder groups

The information authority will:

- Establish wide and deep networks across the FE system
- Provide a variety of mechanisms for engaging with stakeholder groups e.g. for consultation or promulgation of standards
- Ensure that the views of all stakeholder groups are considered in developing its work
- Develop an effective mechanism for tracking issues and incorporating them into *the information authority* workplan

Measures and performance:

- Development and implementation of a comprehensive stakeholder and communication plan. **Plan for 2009/10 in place and being implemented – endorsed by the Board.**
- Provision of face to face groups, teleconferences, and a user-friendly community website for stakeholder engagement. All to be in place by March 2008. **Complete and ongoing – use of our online community site (feconnect) continues to grow. We also established a temporary local authorities’ group to provide a channel to raise issues and increase understanding about the MoG transition.**
- The set up of a clear, easy to navigate website which provides easy access to documents, information and help to be in place by March 2008. **www.theia.org.uk continues to be well-used and improvements continue.**
- In conjunction with the Data Service, provision of a responsive Customer Relationship Management function. **The Data Service’s Service Desk is now established and supported as appropriate by the information authority.**
- Feedback from stakeholders as to effectiveness of engagement. **Evidence from the 2009 Perception Survey indicates that**

awareness and understanding of our work has improved significantly over the 2008/09.

2.4 Eliminate data duplication

The information authority will:

- Undertake a complete review of data captured in the ILR to reduce data duplication
- Consider for all new change requests whether data is already captured or can be combined with an existing collection
- Challenge any proposals where data is to be collected which is already captured elsewhere
- Encourage the review of existing data collections to remove data duplication
- Rationalise data algorithms and reporting so that discrepancies in interpretation are eliminated

Measures and performance:

- Review the key aspects of the ILR for 2009/10 to eliminate data duplication; with remainder to follow. **Complete for 2009/10; work planned for 2010/11.**
- Development and application of an appropriate assessment criterion (to prevent data duplication) for any proposed change request, to be in place by 31st March 2008. **Complete; assessment of effectiveness has been completed with an action plan now in place for improving the 2011/12 process.**
- Deliver an agreed approach for harmonising success rate reporting by LSC / Ofsted by June 2008. **FE success rates and employer responsive provision success rates are now aligned. Work continues in other areas and proposals are place for the information authority to take over ownership of this group.**
- Identification of data collections / reporting mechanisms within the FE system and the provision of support for their review to remove data duplication or discrepancies. **Ongoing. Continuing collections have been identified and will be reviewed.**
- The establishment of standards to be adopted by the Data Service to eliminate data duplication and discrepancies in algorithms / reporting. **Processes are being developed to ensure that business data definitions and associated algorithms are properly governed.**

2.5 Focus on data for key FE performance metrics

The information authority will:

- Work with government departments / agencies and the FE sector to identify key performance areas
- Set standards for key FE performance metrics within priority areas
- Evaluate the standards being proposed for new / improved performance measurement mechanisms to ensure consistency, clarity and the minimising of data burden

Measures and performance:

- Adoption of priority areas for *information authority* work: 1) learner data, 2) awarding data, 3) staff data. **Complete and ongoing**
- The specification of standards for key collections /reports within the priority areas, commencing with the ILR. **Complete for key part of ILR specification for 2009/10; ongoing.**
- Development and implementation of clear data standards for performance management tools such as Framework for Excellence and Minimum Levels of Performance. **This work has yet to be planned.**

2.6 Reduced set of standard reports

The information authority will:

- Specify a standard set of reports for key FE data
- Define data access rules for FE data (including Data Protection issues)

Measures and performance:

- Evaluate through the Data Service which reports are currently produced, and propose a rationalisation of these reports; initial phase by October 2008. **Not yet started due to lack of resource.**
- Develop and publish clear, data access rules for the Data Service covering all agencies / departments / providers for April 2008 operation by June 2008. **Determined that this is the responsibility of the data owners e.g. LSC.**
- Establishment of a Data Protection champion within *the information authority* by May 2008. **Expertise sourced from within the LSC to provide Data Protection guidance for providers; training of staff within *the information authority* to be undertaken.**

2.7 Perceived to act with integrity and add real value

The information authority will:

- Act to reduce bureaucracy wherever possible, balancing the data need vs. burden
- Establish clear and transparent assessment criteria for all change requests
- Communicate clearly how decisions have been taken
- Take decisions in the interests of the FE system as a whole including learners (and wherever possible act for the benefit of the wider education system)
- Deliver 'value for money'

Measures and performance:

- Feedback from stakeholders on reduction of burden and quality of decisions. **Initial feedback positive; work has continued in this area.**
- Rationale for decisions to be published on *the information authority* website **Complete and ongoing.**
- Measurement of reduction in burden following initial benchmarking exercise (to be completed by May 2008). **Initial measurement taken; a**

comprehensive report is being prepared for BIS around all work completed in this area.

3. Next steps

The board is asked to provide further feedback and guidance on performance to date, and whether any adjustments should be made to the performance criteria.

Appendix D

Dashboard to follow.