



The information authority board meeting, 4 March 2009 Meeting Notes, Action and Decision Points

Held on: 4 March 2009, 10:30 – 14.00, at Techno Centre, Coventry

Attendees: Board members / alternates - Jo Baty (LGA), Alan Clamp (Ofsted), Jon Collis (ALP), Julian Gravatt (AoC), Chris James (Asset Skills), Graham Jones (Chair), Caroline Kempner (LSC), Bobbie McClelland (DIUS), Fiona Pethick (Ofqual), Bob Powell (HOLEX), Ian Pryce (FE College Provider). Others - Pete Ashton (*information authority*), Una Bennett (*information authority*), Elizabeth Brookfield (IfL), Anne Fessi (*information authority*), Helen Karabatos (*information authority*), Selvy Kasparis (*information authority*), David Mason (David Mason Consultancy), Tim Smith (LSC), Gareth Thomas (LSC), Ian Thomson (DIUS)

Apologies: Malcolm Britton (DCSF), Margaret Coleman (LSC), Mario Ferelli (HEFCE), Melanie Hunt (Ofsted), Ivor Jones (LLUK), Caroline Miller (Learning Provider), Isabel Nisbet (Ofqual), Susan Pember (DIUS)

1 – Introductions and Welcome

The chairman welcomed all attendees, gave apologies and introduced new people to the board: Jo Baty (LGA), Alan Clamp (Ofsted), Caroline Kempner (LSC), Gareth Thomas (LSC), Bobbie McClelland (DIUS), Ian Thomson (DIUS).

2 – Review of Previous Minutes, 3 December 2008

Jon Collis noted a correction to **Action 12/08 -13**; this action was for the ALP Executive. Subject to this amendment, the board agreed the minutes from the last meeting were accurate.

3 – Review of actions from previous meeting and matters arising

Updates to the following actions were noted:

Action 10/08–11: The LSC is tendering for work to identify employer contribution to training and therefore the action was closed.

Action 10/08–13: The LSC will provide periodic updates on progress against the agreed action plan on data burden to *the information authority* board. The action was closed.

Action 10/08–14: DIUS was asked to provide support to ensure cultural issues relating to data burden are addressed in the set up of the new agencies. Further updates will be provided.

Action 12/08–01: A written update had been provided by LLUK and this included that very few staff returns had been made by independent training, and adult and community providers. The board raised concerns regarding the agreement of the specification for WBL and ACL providers. The board asked for a formal update from LLUK at the June meeting.

Action 03/09–01: Update from LLUK on staff data collection particularly relating to WBL and ACL providers to be scheduled for June 2009 board meeting.

4 – LSC Data Burden Action Plan

4.1 European Social Fund (ESF)

Caroline Kempner outlined progress and actions to reduce data burden e.g. the use of existing fields and removal of the ESF short record. Due to a relaxation of regulations, subject to confirmation, matched funding can use existing funding streams meaning that competitive tendering will no longer be required so extensively.

Action 03/09–2: An update is to be provided by the LSC / Skills Funding Agency (SFA) by March 2010 on whether the perceived data burden for ESF funding has reduced.

4.2 Train to Gain

The Train to Gain (TtG) team had reviewed processes to reduce bureaucracy. The Bureaucracy Review Group (BRG) had supported this work with a reduction in previous paper work from 17 down to four standard forms. Una Bennett reported that the TtG team had responded positively to feedback from the secretariat on the paperwork.

The board raised the issue of the need to verify contract of employment and check individual passports. The related audit regime is also thought to be burdensome. Although the board welcomed the reduction in numbers of TtG forms, they wondered why it was not possible to have one form.

The board confirmed its support for reducing TtG paperwork and encouraged future improvements particularly for 2010/11.

Action 03/09–3: The secretariat is to forward copies of the revised Train to Gain guidance and forms to Chris James, Asset Skills.

4.3 Ad Hoc data demands

The LSC has begun work to investigate differences in perception between the LSC and providers on the volume of ad hoc data requests. The *information authority* is proposing to develop a data collection calendar and associated updates to give providers a baseline. As part of the SFA / Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) transition, Caroline Kempner reported the LSC is working on a joint business cycle which would include the needs of DCSF and DIUS. If themes are identified around ad

hoc requests, then the Data Service would be asked to produce additional standard reports.

Ian Pryce advised that one of the issues was the difficulty in recognising local LSC data used for funding allocations and LSC requests to provide data in different formats to the ILR. Although ad hoc data demands had decreased, there were still too many.

The board expressed concerns about the potential increases in ad hoc requests following formation of the new funding bodies. Julian Gravatt pointed out that although the new funding bodies are expected to have powers to share data, they may not have a duty to share data and therefore data requests may be duplicated. This was an area where *the information authority* should help.

Bobbie McClelland said that DIUS would aim to create a system in which data is collected once and that data systems will be designed to enable data sharing with the new SFA, YPLA and local authorities. Jo Baty offered to feed back from the local authority data group on how it was envisaged that data sharing issues would be managed.

Action 03/09-4: DIUS to investigate as part of the set up of the new funding agencies how they might be brought together to encourage good practice around data collection and data sharing e.g. through *the information authority* protocol.

Action 03/09-5: Jo Baty to provide an update on how data sharing issues were expected to be managed (from a local authority perspective) post the set up of the new funding arrangements.

4.4 Guidance for frontline staff

The information authority and the Data Service are providing additional communications for providers. The Data Service has been piloting a provider support helpdesk in the North East; if successful this will be rolled out nationally.

The chairman on behalf of the board acknowledged the work so far and awaited further updates.

Action 03/09-6: The LSC is to provide a further update to *the information authority* on addressing the provider data burden issues at the September 2009 board meeting.

Action 03/09-7: DIUS is to measure the impact of change on provider data burden following the dissolution of the LSC.

5 – Institute for Learning, Data Collection

Elizabeth Brookfield explained that IfL is a professional body for further education teachers, which helps monitor regulation and compliance issues around professional qualifications and continuous personal development.

The board clarified that the *information authority's* interest was in whether there was any duplication of data collection with LLUK and ensuring common data standards were being used to allow data sharing where appropriate.

Elizabeth pointed out that the methods of data collection used by IfL and LLUK were different. Peter Ashton agreed that IfL may produce information that is not comparable to that produced by LLUK.

IfL data is provided on an anonymised basis to DIUS, and to Ofsted to assess the numbers of qualified staff at a particular institution. The board saw this provision of data to Ofsted as a concern as its accuracy could not be guaranteed and providers would expect to provide such data themselves.

On behalf of the board, the chairman summed up concerns both about the possible duplication in the data collected by IfL and LLUK, and the use of the IfL data even at an anonymised level. It was suggested that the secretariat work with IfL and LLUK to see how duplication issues could be overcome. It was noted that due to resource constraints this work could not start for some time.

Action 03/09–8: IfL to report further at June 2009 board on when data sharing occurs.

Action 03/09–9: The secretariat to work with IfL and LLUK to see whether any data duplication in the respective collections can be eliminated.

6 – Top Down information needs assessment

David Mason presented his report for DIUS which looked at use of information throughout the FE system from the perspective of learners, employers, providers and the community. Practice varied from very good to poor. Often databases were difficult to access or search, or were rudimentary with duplication found in data sets. A number of case studies had highlighted some excellent practice.

The report was not final and the board was asked to comment on draft recommendations which covered a five year time period. These were: 'one version of the truth' using Customer Relationship Management (CRM) techniques; mandatory data standards and an interoperability framework post-14; shared services; and knowledge management to identify, share and disseminate best practice.

The board queried whether the views of SMEs as employers and those responsible for funding had been adequately represented. It was commented that it was difficult to achieve standard information for short-term provision e.g. in application processes.

Bobbie McClelland advised that a shared service function and a shared platform were being proposed as part of the new SFA / YPLA arrangements. On a further education application process, Julian Gravatt noted that the current roll-out of the Common Application Process meant there would be multiple versions across the country, while the AoC had proposed a national basis implemented regionally.

Overall, the board supported the draft recommendations. The report's conclusions have yet to be verified or accepted by DIUS. Thereafter the full report will be made available.

Action 03/09-10: The final version of the Top Down report is to be distributed to the board.

7 – Reduction of Learner Data Paper Records

Una Bennett reported on a feasibility study on reducing paper learner records. This followed the provider data burden report which indicated that large amounts of paper records were being retained for audit purposes. The LSC has not had the opportunity to respond formally to the study.

Issues identified included the volume and complexity of documentation associated with funding and contracting; the difficulty of identifying audit requirements; and therefore varying interpretations by providers and auditors. 2009/10 funding guidance is due to be published shortly, therefore recommendations concentrated on 2010/11 and set up of the new FE funding arrangements.

Recommendations included: principles for simplifying funding and contracting documentation for 2010/11 onwards; establishing consistent commissioning processes between the new FE funding bodies; aligning audit evidence to providers' processes rather than using proforma forms; development of electronic evidence audit requirements; and ensuring consistency in auditing of publicly funded FE provision.

Caroline Kempner noted that the LSC will formally respond to the report. She pointed out that the LSC had already reduced its funding guidance. The overall timing may be difficult as any large-scale review by the LSC would need commitment from the two new agencies, the SFA and YPLA, and local authorities.

The chairman and Bobbie McClelland agreed that the Machinery of Government transition presented an opportunity for improvement. Bobbie committed to feeding the general principles into the SFA set up and would report back to the board.

Involving local authorities in *information authority* processes was raised as a way of taking forward some of the recommendations. Jo Baty reported that the Association of Directors of Children's Services was expected to sign up to *the information authority* protocol.

The board supported the recommendations to reduce paper learner data records and encouraged all to use the set up of the new funding arrangements as an opportunity to make these improvements.

Action 03/09-11: Bobbie McClelland (DIUS) to feed in recommendations for reducing paper learner data records to the set up arrangements for the SFA.

Action 03/09-12: The LSC is to provide a formal response to the recommendations on reducing paper learner records.

Action 03/09-13: Jo Baty will facilitate the signing of *the information authority* protocol by the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

Action 03/09-14: Jo Baty will consider how local authority sub regional groups can be involved with *the information authority*, and taking forward the proposals to reduce paper learner records.

8 – Recent Developments in the Framework for Excellence (FfE)

Tim Smith outlined the changes to both Version 1 and 2 of FfE. This included the removal of the overall performance rating (OPR) and other measures. An OPR may be reintroduced to support the schools' report card scheduled for 2012. Version 3 of FfE is being developed as a uniform framework across further education and school sixth forms.

The board welcomed the direction of the changes which had addressed some of the board's concerns. In further versions of the framework, it was suggested that indicators were geared to types of provision, not types of provider.

The board endorsed the changes to FfE and asked for details of Version 2 to be circulated, and for Version 3 to be brought to the next meeting in June.

Action 03/09-15: Tim Smith to circulate details of Version 2 of FfE to board members, and to present Version 3 at June 2009 board meeting.

Action 03/09-16: Jo Baty to speak to Tim Smith about local authority input to Version 3 of FfE.

9 – Data Harmonisation

Mike Davis outlined the work of the Data Harmonisation Group, progress so far and the need for common definitions of qualification success rates (QSRs) The current focus is on standardising QSRs for Apprenticeships and Train to Gain.

A proposal has been developed for Apprenticeships QSRs. Following consultation and if agreed, parallel running could start from September 2009. There are, however, some differences on Train to Gain which have not as yet been resolved.

Mike's view is that to resolve QSRs for the FE Post 16 system a 'tinkering' of the system is not sufficient and that a totally new model is needed that will provide consistency. He will present a paper to the Harmonisation Group in mid March.

The board endorsed the direction of the work on harmonising QSRs and encouraged further progress. The board was supportive of the secretariat's ongoing involvement in this work and in particular of the communication work around QSRs e.g. definitions, progress on harmonisation etc.

Action 03/09-17: Mike Davis to circulate his report on harmonising QSRs to the board and to provide a further update at the June 2009 board meeting.

10 – The *information authority* secretariat report

10.1 Urgent changes to the ILR specification for 2009/10

The chairman informed the board that DIUS had advised that the proposed changes were imperative and the department was asking for the board's support.

Caroline Kempner and Gareth Thomas presented the changes explaining that they reflected requests outlined in the supplementary LSC grant letter and all supported the government's response (and FE's contribution) to addressing the economic downturn. They recognised that the proposals were very late and confirmed that these were part of an ongoing process to track work related skills.

Pete Ashton provided an update on provider feedback on two of the changes (1 and 3) below. The second change on employment status had been received too late to permit any consultation prior to the board meeting.

1) This change request was to introduce a new field to record employment outcome enabling payments for certain programmes. This would reduce administration for providers that are already providing such programmes and have to record data separately. The necessary audit evidence was not yet clear.

Jon Collis had some concerns about the proposed solution i.e. the use of a '99' code if funding is not being claimed. However, he was supportive of the change.

The board agreed the addition of a field to record employment outcome (for programmes where a funding payment was linked to an employment outcome).

Action 03/09-18: Pete Ashton is to speak to Jon Collis about the detail of the proposed solution for capturing employment outcome.

2) This request was to capture employment status at the beginning and end of learning of all in learner and employer responsive provision. This is to assess the impact of further education on employment including on those who were economically inactive at the start of a programme.

The board expressed concerns about the potential data quality particularly as it had not been possible to obtain provider feedback on this change.

The board agreed in principle to recording employment status for all learners in learner and employer responsive at the beginning and end of programmes subject to positive feedback from providers on the likely data quality.

Action 03/09-19: The secretariat to provide an update to the board on provider feedback to the proposed capture of employment status for those on learner and employer responsive programmes. This will enable a final decision on this proposal.

3) This request was to collect information on those in employer responsive provision who became redundant during training.

Jon Collis advised that independent training providers would support a survey by the LSC in 2008/09 to enable a judgement on the effect on Minimum Levels of Performance of redundancies. All board members were very supportive of the proposals.

The board agreed a change to enable the collection of data on employment status at the start and end of learning in order to identify learners who become redundant while on employer responsive provision.

10.2 Protocol and terms of reference

The board asked for further consideration of the terms of reference and the protocol for *the information authority* to ensure they met the needs of parties such as the new funding bodies and DCSF. The chairman proposed that all parties should be asked to sign up to the revised protocol,

Action 03/09-20: The secretariat is to circulate a revised version of the terms of reference and protocol for agreement by the board. Thereafter all organisations should be asked to sign up to the revised protocol.

10.3 Performance criteria for *the information authority*

The board confirmed that they were content with progress against the authority's performance criteria.

Bob Powell queried whether the authority had sufficient resource to make the desired progress. Una Bennett confirmed there were some resource issues and that it was proving difficult to fill some vacant posts.

10.4 Changes agreed to the ILR for 2009/10

The board agreed to publish the list of codes of LSC number of funding field in the specification for 2009/10, unchanged from 2008/09, in the absence of an agreed update from the LSC.

10.5 Implications arising from hard close of F05

Una Bennett reminded the board of the decision to enforce a 'hard close' of F05 for 2007/08 data at 6 February 2009 to enable funding allocations and the calculation of a common FE qualification success rate. She reported that a couple of providers had been adversely affected by snow on 5 and 6 February and complained that they had been unable to provide final revisions to this data. This issue had been referred to the chairman of the board who had upheld the original decision on the close date given the time and cost associated with re-processing the data files.

The LSC had confirmed that where there was a significant difference they would adjust funding locally, and the providers had been advised to inform Ofsted of any concerns regarding success rates.

Although the board was sympathetic to affected providers, the board supported the approach taken on the enforcement of the F05 hard close given the wider ramifications.

10.6 Awarding data standard

Una Bennett brought to the attention of the board the agreement in principle by key stakeholders to development of a common data standard for qualification entry and results notification. Work is commencing via the Systems Interoperability Framework Association.

10.7 Development of the Staff Individualised Record

Bob Powell queried the support required from the board to LLUK's change group for developing the staff record for WBL and ACL providers.

Action 03/09-21: The secretariat will confirm with LLUK the support required from *the information authority* for their change group.

11 – Meeting with FE Minister, Sion Simon

The chairman reported that he and Una Bennett had had a positive meeting with Sion Simon, the FE minister. The minister recognised and was complimentary of the ongoing contribution by members of the *information authority* board, and the overall progress of *the information authority*. Sion Simon offered his assistance in raising the authority's profile including through the Machinery of Government changes.

The minister confirmed that Graham Jones' term as chairman would be extended for a further year.

Next meeting: 10 June 2009, Coventry Techno Centre

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