

# Minutes

<b>Date</b>	24 November 2011
<b>Subject</b>	LR Provider Group
<b>Location</b>	Cheylesmore House, Coventry
<b>Time</b>	11am-3:30pm
<b>Publication intent</b>	PUBLIC DOCUMENT

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## **Item 1. Welcome and introductions**

## **Item 2. Minutes of last meeting**

## **Item 3. Data Service software (technical questions)**

- 3.1 The Data Service's David Young informed the group that an updated version of the Learner Information Suite had just been released. He explained that some functionality was failing and so a decision was made to switch off the aspects of the reports that were causing problems.
- 3.2 David explained that there were further fixes due to be made to the data collection system by the end of November. There have been some problems relating to upper/lower case sensitivity and very short courses. Some providers experienced issues with R03. For example, files submitted by one provider did not seem to be processed in the order they were submitted in.
- 3.3 The group were very critical of the delivery of LIS this year, highlighting that the known issues with the latest release ran to five pages. There was also criticism of the language used in the known issues document. For example, some known issues are listed as 'resolved', even though the remedial action was to reduce functionality rather than to fix problem. The group wanted reassurance that all of the problems would eventually be fixed.
- 3.4 The group explained that they now had very little confidence in the LIS and are very concerned that future allocations could be based on LIS generated data that is inaccurate. Several group members had examples of different problems that they were encountering, such as learners not being counted, learners without ethnicity data being lost and one case where two learners have identical funding information, but only one of the two is appearing as a funded learner. These problems have been logged with the Service Desk.

3.5 There was a discussion about how the amalgamation process is working. Learners should be validated based on their funding stream, but some providers suggest that their learners all seem to be treated as ER learners. There are slides from a previous meeting that include an overview of the amalgamation process.

**Action: Group members to email [Lisa Macdougall](#) with any problems they are having with the amalgamation process so that she can investigate them.**

3.6 The group queried what the provider factor is for 16-18 provision. There is a Regional Factor used for calculations in the LIS, but the number used differs from the factor listed in provider contracts.

**Action: Paul to find further information on Regional Factors.**

3.7 David spoke about the Learning Aim Reference Application (LARA). He said there were no backlogs at present. He was asked why there was 2010/11 information in a system developed for 2011/12. He explained that it was simpler to leave some 2010/11 data, rather than take it out.

3.8 There was a discussion on how qualifications are assigned to particular Sector Skills Agencies. The group highlighted some unusual cases. David's understanding is that Ofqual is ultimately responsible for this, but in practice Ofqual's approach seems to be to make awarding organisations responsible for their data.

3.9 Other comments on LARA included:

- a request that end dates should be set to match academic years
- the information should fit with the new terminology (classroom / workplace learning) rather than ER and LR.
- a definition is needed for what is included within 'ER other'

#### **Item 4. 2011/12 ILR and changes for 2012/13**

4.1 Lisa Macdougall explained that the LIS and OLDC were slightly out of sync, but that this would be rectified as soon as possible. She ran through some of the known issues. For example, files may go through LIS without any problems, only for OLDC to reject them. Common issues are that the file contains foreign characters such as é. The Data Service is working to correct these problems and they should all be detailed in the Data Collection known issues log. Providers reiterated that problems like this mean that they have less time to submit good quality data.

4.2 Lisa gave a presentation on the ILR changes for 2012/13. Further information is available in the presentation slides. The group were critical of the proposed changes to the Employment Status data items. Lisa was recommending that, for most learners, employment status should only be collected once at the point the learner first enrolls with a provider (as happens with prior attainment). Lisa also presented a list of simplified options for employment status and clarified that this information is only required for adult learners.

4.3 Pete Ashton explained to the group that BIS want to collect this information so that they are able to demonstrate to the treasury that the FE system is able to get the unemployed back into work and / or that learners have

benefited from FE by gaining higher salaries following their qualifications. Therefore, it is vital for the good of the sector that this information is available.

- 4.4 The group commented that splits between data required for adults and young people creates additional burden for them. They also pointed out that they may well need to review a learner's employment status on a regular basis to make sure that their learning plan is still suitable. It was suggested that *the information authority* feed back to BIS that the government should seek to make more use of the National Insurance numbers that are collected, rather than asking the provider to capture the employment status of all adult learners.
- 4.5 It was agreed that *the information authority* would consult the sector before implementing any changes.

**Post-meeting update: Following feedback from this group and other comments received subsequently, amendments were made to the collection of employment status information. The results can be seen in the 2012/13 ILR specification.**

#### **Item 5. Documenting the uses of ILR data fields**

- 5.1 Pete Ashton explained that one of the first things *the information authority* was asked to clarify was how each field in the ILR is used. As a result, there is a detailed list of data item uses published in Appendix P part B of the ILR specification. However, now that there are more funding organisations, Pete suggested that now is a good time to review the way that the information is presented.
- 5.2 Prior to the meeting, Pete circulated a number of possible ways to display this information and asked for feedback. Most of the group opted for the same option and so this will be taken forward. Also it was agreed that the information should reflect what the field is mainly used for. The group were happy for Pete to use his judgement on what constitutes the 'main' use.

#### **Item 6. Discussion with Rich Williams (Head of the Data Service)**

- 6.1 Rich apologised for the problems that providers are experiencing due to delays in Data Service software. He acknowledged that some of the functionality in the current Learner Information Suite is not yet available, but he assured the group that the known issues are all being addressed. He explained that the Data Service took the decision to put out a working version of the LIS with some functionality switched off, rather than ask the sector to wait until a complete version was ready.
- 6.2 Rich explained that early on in the project, it had been difficult to get the amalgamation function right. Without the amalgamation working, the whole project would have failed. Those delays meant that they had less time to focus on funding reports, hence there are still issues with some reports.
- 6.3 The group explained just how important the funding reports are, both to them and to the funding agencies. The agencies use LIS reports to make future

funding decisions. Rich acknowledged that, but commented that he is aware that there are some providers that do not use the LIS at all.

- 6.4 There was a discussion about the Skills Funding Agency's account / relationship managers and whether they were fully aware of the current issues. Providers want reassurance that the funding agencies will show some flexibility if the LIS generates figures which they disagree with. Rich said that he could see no reason why they would not be willing to discuss any discrepancies with individual providers.
- 6.5 One of the group's main frustrations is the lack of funding information for future years. Several providers present gave examples of continuing learners who were funded last year, but are on aims that are not funded this year. One comment was that the chopping and changing of funding information is unacceptable and makes a mockery of provider attempts to plan. Rich agreed with the group on this issue and said that he has asked the funding agencies to provide funding information earlier. He suggested that MI staff could lobby their representative associations, such as the Association of Colleges and Association of Employment and Learning Providers, to raise the profile of these issues.
- 6.6 Rich was also asked about the use of Unique Learner Numbers. The group expressed concern that they have to put a lot of time and effort into getting ULNs, yet awarding organisations do not seem to have bought into using them. Rich said that there has been some very recent movement on this. JCQ have agreed to look at using the Personal Learning Record.
- 6.7 Rich was asked if he was confident that the data collection systems would cope with the R04 data return. Rich is confident that if providers return data before 6pm on the final day, then it will be processed. However, he pointed out how risky it is for providers to leave their returns until the afternoon of the final day. Rich recommends that all providers make an earlier submission and allow time to get any error reports back and deal with any problems.
- 6.8 The group expressed concern that the significant changes due for 2013/14 could lead to similar system delays and problems. Rich explained that he aims to get the relatively straight forward changes for 2012/13 to be completed by April 2012, so that they have a far longer lead in time to prepare for the 2013/14 changes.
- 6.9 There was a discussion about the funding simplification planned by both the Skills Funding Agency and the YPLA. Providers are concerned that the agencies seem to have competing agendas and that this could lead to the need for two modules of software to handle disparate requirements.

## **Item 7. Update on the YPLA's funding consultation**

- 7.1 Elisabeth Baines from the YPLA spoke to the group about the Department for Education's consultation on funding. <http://www.ypla.gov.uk/news/latest/16-19-funding-formula-review-consultation.htm> Group members were encouraged to respond before the consultation closes on 4 January 2012. Elisabeth said it will be ministers that make key decisions rather than YPLA staff.

- 7.2 Elisabeth highlighted that the consultation seems to suggest that the DfE are keen to use a pupil premium and are considering using previous Free School Meal eligibility to identify learners with additional funding. The proposals suggest that they want funding to be as simple as possible, perhaps by providing pounds per learner and trusting the provider to deliver appropriate aims for each individual.
- 7.3 Several members of the group suggested that they would prefer there to be some additional criteria so that learning providers are rewarded for delivering better provision than their competitors. There was also a concern that the proposals could lead to some learning providers cherry picking learners – essentially getting the same amount of money for learners that required less learning delivery. There was also a discussion about how many guided learning hours the payments would be based on. Currently definitions vary from 336 hours to 600 hours.

### **Item 8. Skills Funding Agency funding update**

- 8.1 Nick Chomyk from the Skills Funding Agency referred the group to the Skills Funding Agency's document entitled [A new streamlined funding system for adult skills](#). Nick reminded the group that this document is not a consultation, but a strong indication of what will be introduced. Nick informed the group that by the end of January 2012, the LIS will have a shadow funding calculation to give an indication of the likely funding for the same provision in 2013/14. In the first quarter of 2012/13, there will be a dual running so that providers can see precisely what their provision would be worth in 2013/14. This year of dual running will enable the Agency to identify and resolve any issues before 2013/14. Nick did warn that there will be eligibility changes for 2013/14 and so there is no guarantee that all learners included in the shadow calculations will actually be eligible for funding.
- 8.2 There was a discussion about what funding rates, if any, will be in version 2 of the LIS to demonstrate future funding. The group highlighted that if the intention is for this to help providers plan for the future, then they need to know what rates will be paid for each qualification. Nick said that rates will be rates there, but they will be based on their best estimate of the 2013/14 rates. Nick said it was unlikely that they would be able to set 2013/14 rates in January 2012. He explained that the Agency still has to decide how to price unlisted qualifications.
- 8.3 There was a debate on the future funding of ESOL. Nick suggested that the likelihood is that if ESOL is required for a learner to find work, then it should be fundable. If not, then it is likely that learners will be expected to contribute. The group pointed out that a lack of clarity on things like this and unlisted rates, will mean that learners and employers will not understand what offers are available or what the costs will be. In the future, if a learner is to take out a loan to pay for their courses, then the pricing will have to be clear. The group also flagged up problems regarding JSA learners being set ESOL requirements as part of the Programmes for the Unemployed (PfU). The group's view was that the limit of 76 hours for this provision is insufficient for the providers to deliver what is necessary.

- 8.4 Nick informed the group that in 2013/14, the ALR calculation will go. The ER calculation will be used, because it is more dynamic. Nick also said that the Agency plans to stop balancing payments, so if a learner completes a ten month programme in seven months, providers will not get the last three payments.

### **Item 9. Future plans for Qualification Success Rates**

- 9.1 Stuart Vickers from the Skills Funding Agency informed the group that any achievements from 2010/11 completed within the first 90 days of 2011/12 must be reported in R04. Historically period three data was used, so the new arrangement gives learning providers more time to return this data.
- 9.2 The Agency is working with the Data Service on national success rate tables for apprenticeships. The intention is to enable providers to compare their results with national results. The tables will probably show both timely and overall success rates.
- 9.3 From 2011/12, interim reports on ER success rates will not be as frequent. The data collection arrangements have changed following the move to the single ILR and so, instead of monthly reports, the expectation is that the reports will be produced shortly after each of the 'main' returns.
- 9.4 David Craig from the Young People's Learning Agency informed the group that they expect to release some information in January 2012 that uses 2009/10 data to compare schools with FE. David's view is that the figures will reflect well on FE providers. He pointed out that 2011/12 will be the first year that any direct comparison can be made. That will be the first time the same methodology will be applied to both datasets.
- 9.5 There was a discussion about the measures of success. Some group members commented that where learners finish a course early, because they have found a job, this should be classed as a success. Stuart acknowledged this view and would like to take this into account as the 2011/12 methodology is developed, but it may not be able to record this in the ILR. The same point was made for 16-18 year old learners – success rates go down if a learner leaves to start work, despite the fact that this is a positive outcome. David's view is that in future the YPLA is likely to look at progression and achievements that providers deliver as well as success rates.

### **Item 10. Course Directory**

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 Paul said that *the information authority's* approach will 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/>

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

**Item 11. Meeting dates for 2012**

11.1 It was agreed that the meetings for 2012 would be set for March, June and late November. Dates will be confirmed shortly.

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## Meeting Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Andrea Watts	Wiltshire College
Anthea Smith	Henley College
Dan Starkey	South Birmingham College
David Craig	Young People's Learning Agency
David Woodward	The Sixth Form College Farnborough
David Young	The Data Service
Dipa Ganguli	Croydon Adult Learning and Training
Elisabeth Baines	Young People's Learning Agency
James Ingamells	Linkage Community Trust
Kerrie Turner	Birmingham Metropolitan College
Lisa Macdougall	<i>The information authority</i>
Meté Kiamil	Conel College
Mike Wicks	The Data Service
Nick Chomyk	Skills Funding Agency
Pat Bee	Warwickshire College
Paul Kelman	<i>The information authority</i>
Paul Rabbich	Gloucestershire College
Pete Ashton	<i>The information authority</i>
Peter Buckley	Tameside College
Peter Mudd	South Downs College
Rich Williams	The Data Service
Richard Pyka	Linkage Community Trust
Richard Wyszeccki	NE Worcs College
Sandra Howell	Birmingham Metropolitan College
Sean Lee	Newcastle College
Sheena Thomas	Include (CfBT)
Stephen Hewitt	Morley College
Steve Menear	Birmingham Metropolitan College
Stuart Vickers	Skills Funding Agency
Sue Linsley Hood	TCMD Ltd
Tracy Tenant	Community Training Services Ltd
Valerie Woska	Harrow College