

Report

Item 11 – Secretariat Report

Date of issue	09 June 2010
Audience	<i>the information authority</i> board
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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 two 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 March 2010 and that planned before the next meeting in September 2010.

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

The following decisions are required:

3.1 Connexions Data – way forward

- 3.1.1 *The information authority* hosted a meeting on 28 May where Connexions services, the Department for Education (DfE) and the YPLA met with a range of learning providers to discuss Connexions data issues. There was a real willingness to improve data collection in this area by agreeing a standard dataset and collection timetable rather than continuing with the current 'ad hoc' data collections. There is a requirement for a rolling monthly dataset generated by learning providers to give very basic individual level information about learning offers that have been made, current learners, non-starters and leavers. Learning providers indicated that the data needed is already gathered for their own business uses and so would be simple to report provided that a standard specification is used. Providers also seemed willing to share this monthly information with the YPLA. It should be feasible to put a dataset to *the information authority*

board in September 2010, with a view to implementing it for the September 2011 intake.

- 3.1.2 Further work needs to be done to investigate possible mechanisms through which learning providers can securely transfer data to one repository for appropriate Connexions services and the YPLA to access. This would rectify cross border issues and enable national providers to contribute data to Connexions. A mechanism or protocol should also be established so that Connexions services can provide destination data to learning providers on learners that they made offers to or who dropped out of learning.
- 3.1.3 *The information authority* should define standards for course prospectus information and as part of that work influence the data requirements to ensure standardisation of all Common Application Processes.
- 3.1.4 *The information authority* should work with Connexions services, the Department for Education and learning providers to produce guidance on how learning providers and Connexions services can work together to ensure that learners who have dropped out of learning, or at risk of doing so, are identified early and offered pastoral support.
- 3.1.5 Better use needs to be made of the Unique Learner Number as an identifier to help track learners. To enable that, *the information authority* will work with the Learning Records Service and DfE to improve the administration of the ULN in schools.

The board is asked to support these developments and to identify any issues or concerns that they would like to see addressed.

3.2 Data Burden / Simplification Report for BIS

- 3.2.1 The secretariat is drafting a report to summarise the changes made and work carried out to: address the data burden issues raised before and within the 2008 Data Burden Report; cover how progress to tackle these issues has informed and complemented BIS's simplification strategy; and identify those over-arching issues which will be taken forward in the Learner Data Strategy.
- 3.2.2 The report will also provide a 'baseline' for a proposed second Data Burden study to be carried out later this year that will identify current concerns regarding data burden that assist to focus future work in this area.
- 3.2.3 An initial report has been submitted to BIS and feedback has been received. A revised draft is now being prepared and will be circulated to *information authority* board members for comment before being submitted to BIS.

The board is asked to confirm that it is broadly happy with the contents of the report as outlined above and that board members are willing to review an electronic copy.

3.5 Progress report

3.5.1 The secretariat has provided a summary of progress since the last board meeting in March, and that planned up until September 2010 (see **Appendix A**).

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* summary performance 'dashboard'

3.7.1 The performance dashboard is a separate document (**Appendix C**) – 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 March 2010 to September 2010 (Appendix A)
- *The information authority* work plan (Appendix B)
- Summary Performance Dashboard (Appendix C – separate document)

5 Contact Details

- a. Author: Anne Fessi
- b. Job Title: *information authority* secretariat
- c. Organisation: *The information authority*
- d. E-mail address: anne.fessi@theia.org.uk
- e. Phone Number: 024 7682 3325

Appendix A

Progress report

Activities for last period (March 2010 – June 2010)

1. Stakeholder engagement

Events held:

- Advisory Groups – including software suppliers, learner responsive providers, own software writers, employer responsive providers and data users to address current data issues and gather requirements for the 2011/12 ILR.
- *The information authority* presented at the Sector Training National MIS Managers' Conference on the 16 March; at North West CMIS group meeting on 23 April; at the SIF Association UK Conference on 9 June 2010 and at the Sixth Form College Forum Information Systems Conference on 10 June.
- Consultation on changes to the 2011/12 ILR remains active – the deadline for requests is 18 June. The change request review panel meeting is on the 7 July.
- *Note:* much of the communications activity outside of business-as-usual was suspended during April / May due to restrictions imposed in the run-up to the general election.

Publications

- No new publications due to election 'black-out'.

Other meetings / contacts:

- New Head of *the information authority* initiating introductory meetings with all board members (COMPLETE)
- New Head of *the information authority* initiating introductory meetings with key colleagues in LSC / YPLA / SFA (COMPLETE)
- BIS regular contacts
- Data Harmonisation Group – monthly meetings
- BRG – quarterly meetings
- LLUK – meeting to discuss organisational developments
- YPLA – meeting regular contacts
- Skills Funding Agency – meeting regular contacts
- Young People's Directorate Strategy Workshop – 05 March
- Bureaucracy Reduction Group – 13 May
- Data Service – regular contacts including Steering Group
- Various provider visits

- Meeting with the DfE to ensure the coherence of the FE Learner Data Strategy with its strategy for Young People's Data and its Data and Statistics strategies.

Website and community portal

- **Corporate website:**
Trends show that there was an increase in visits and visitors to *the information authority* website throughout April and May due to the publication of a large number of new documents for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 ILR, and also an increase in staff interest following the Machinery of Government changes (particularly staff transferring from the LSC to local authorities).
- **Feconnect:**
Trends show that there is an increase in visits and visitors to **feconnect** when consultations are in progress (see summer 2009 and Feb-Mar 2010).

2. Secretariat team

- Our new Data Quality Manager, Richard Cookson, joined the team on Monday 09 June. Richard came to us from Citibank in Derby where he was a business MI Analysis Manger within the Credit Card product team. Prior to that he was he was a Senior Account Manager for Experian in Nottingham.

3. Quality and standards

- A new online version of the ILR specification was launched in a 'web-help' format in response learning providers asking us to make the ILR specification easier to search and more intuitive to use.
- Learner Data Strategy stakeholder workshops were held throughout the first three weeks in March.
- Worked with QCF and Data Service on future LAD replacement project for 2010/11.
- The third meeting of the FE Data Management Group held on the 21 May.
- Re-publication of 2009/10 Provider Support Manuals.
- Publication of 2010/11 Provider Support Manuals.
- Started to pilot the new process developed by *the information authority* for agreeing business definitions and associated derived variables.
- Worked with the Skills Funding Agency to develop a specification of timeliness to be used with ER ILR returns (for June board).
- Worked with Data Service on data collection system requirements for 2010/11.

4. Budget

4.1 *The information authority* had a budget of £1.28m for the 2009/10 financial year. The actual spend for 2009/10 totalled £1.17m, generating an underspend of £120k. The key areas of underspend were as follows:

- Staff costs of £40k - Two vacant posts not filled during the latter part of the year:
 - Data Standards and Quality
 - Head of *the information authority*
- Project underspend of £75k as a result of the follow up provider data burden study not being commissioned.

4.2 As set out in the attached Dashboard, the *indicative* budget for this financial year (2010/11) is £1.36m.

5. Work in progress

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

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

6. Stakeholder engagement

- The Chairman of *the information authority* is to meet with the Head of the Skills Funding Agency, Geoff Russell, to promote understanding of our work.
- Close of the ILR Change Request process and start of the consultation process for 2011/12.
- Publication and promotion of board decisions taken in June.
- 17 June – *the information authority* is speaking at the Summer College Data Conference
- 24 June – *the information authority* is jointly sponsoring the AoC Data Managers Conference.
- Plans are underway to hold a policy-focused data conference on September 17 at the Cavendish Hotel in London.
- We will continue to facilitate and attend partner events and wider groups to ensure that *the information authority* continues to widen its influence.

7. Secretariat team

- A team planning session scheduled for late May (after the general election) has been postponed due to the lack of clarity during this unstable political period. A rescheduled event is being arranged for later in the year, which will focus on aligning our future work with early priorities for FE indicated by the new government administration. Outputs from this day will be shared with the board and board members will be asked to contribute their views and ideas to help us in planning our work for the remainder of the year.

8. Quality and Standards

- Evaluate requests to change the ILR for 2011/12 develop solutions and prepare paper containing options and recommendations for the September board meeting.
- Take forward the work of the FE Data Management Group.
- The Data Quality and Improvement Manager (recently appointed) will work with key stakeholders to develop a prioritised data quality plan.
- Depending on the level of endorsement of the learner data strategy, take forward actions identified therein.
- Evaluate process for agreeing business definitions and associated derived variables.

9. Governance

- The secretariat will continue to take an active role in the Data Harmonisation Group regarding its work around aligning and simplifying success rates, and continue to seek approval for *the information authority* to take ownership of the group.
- BIS has requested that the secretariat support the Bureaucracy Reduction Group whilst a review of sector-led groups is carried out by the department. This arrangement will continue until July at least.

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 Skills Funding Agency and YPLA to increase understanding and reducing data requests.
- Review the Skills Funding Agency's progress in piloting the implementation of electronic learner records and support efforts to continue this work post-MoG.
- 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. Progress will be reported to the June 2010 board meeting.
- Provide a comprehensive report for BIS, the BRG and *the information authority* board regarding all work completed on data burden work-streams by June 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.

- 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 will continue 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 updated 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 (F05 Group).

- Review of stakeholder engagement including board membership to reflect changes in the political landscape and closer alignment of employment and skills agenda.

- Progress steps to engage with local authorities, the YPLA and the Skills Funding Agency to ensure effective governance of data requirements

- Produce annual report for ministers / stakeholders by October 2010.

- Provide briefing paper for new government ministers by June 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.

7. Performance management of *the information authority*

- Manage *the information authority* against performance criteria agreed annually by *the information authority* board.

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, the Bureaucracy Reduction Group and the Data Harmonisation Group (as required).