

Minutes

Date	13 June 2011
Subject	Software Supplier Group Meeting
Location	Cheylesmore House, Coventry
Time	12:30-4pm
Publication intent	PUBLIC DOCUMENT

Item 1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 John Perks, the Head of *the information authority*, welcomed the group and gave a brief reminder of the reasons that *the information authority* has restructured the ILR and why the Data Service is replatforming its systems.
- 1.2 John was asked about messages coming from *the information authority* and Data Service that these changes would lead to reduced costs. The group made clear that there will always be costs associated with change and so the only way of significantly reducing the costs of software systems would be for *the information authority* and Data Service to make no changes at all.

Item 2. Minutes of last meeting

Item 3. The Single ILR in XML

- 3.1 Lisa Macdougall informed the group that she was currently helping to test the LIS tool and other systems to identify any issues with the new ILR specification. Lisa and her team are compiling a list of known issues and are regularly updating the [ILR documentation known issues log](#) on the website. Once the testing is complete, a new version of the ILR specification and business rules will be published. This is likely to be in July 2011.
- 3.2 A migration mapping specification will also be published. The Data Service will not be migrating batch data for 2011/12 and so it is important for learning providers to report all migration data in their first submission.
- 3.3 In testing, Lisa has found that compressing XML files dramatically reduces their size and so it will be strongly recommended that providers compress before they are uploaded to the data collection system.

Action: *The information authority* to publish details on the compression tools that will be compatible with the data collection system.

- 3.4 The data collection timetable was discussed. In short, Colleges and local authorities return data quarterly (although if they are offering 16-18

apprenticeships then monthly data will be required). All other providers should return data monthly.

- 3.5 There will continue to be reference dates for the quarterly collections and these are broadly in line with the previous F / LR data return schedules.
- 3.6 It is anticipated that providers will use A and B files more. Sometimes providers may only want to give updates on the learners that are needed for each return. An A file is updated at provider level, whereas a B file is updated at a learner level. Lisa pointed out how important it is that providers fully understand the differences and make sure they get the file type right. The LIS tool will merge both A and B files. It will also have a prompt so that providers have to choose whether it is an A or B before the final file is produced.
- 3.7 Lisa was asked to provide a detailed breakdown of the selection criteria to ensure that software systems pick up the right learners.

Action: Lisa to produce the requested selection criteria.

- 3.8 Lisa talked through the employment status. Further details are available in the presentation slides emailed to the group on 14 June 2011.

Item 4. Data Service - Strategic Re-platforming

- 4.1 Alan Billingham gave the group a presentation on the strategic re-platforming project. He informed the group that the Data Service would provide software writers with several beta versions of the LIS before the final version is published at the end of July.
- 4.2 There was a discussion about how the merging function of the LIS would work. The group were informed that learners will only be merged if all of the learner attributes match. If there are problems, the LIS will not stop processing the file, it will just throw out that learner.

Action: Lisa to circulate a specification / flow chart that shows the LIS's decision making when amalgamating files.

- 4.3 The group asked whether the Data Service was prepared for increased file sizes and processing times. Alan said that the data collection system capacity is being significantly increased to handle the increased volume and that there will be further capacity available if it is needed. The collection systems will be monitored to ensure there is sufficient capacity. The file processing times are not yet clear but testing should flag up any problems. One software supplier commented that they'd run a test file of 2,000 learners and that the LIS had processed it in ten seconds.
- 4.4 The group expressed concern that the LARA tables are not yet confirmed and pointed out that the beta version of LARA was different to the draft tables that had been published previously. The group asked for the LARA tables to be confirmed as soon as possible.
- 4.5 Alan talked about the implementation of LARA, explaining that it has not been possible to get all of the functionality into release 1. Release 2 of LARA will be in November and will have all of the additional 'transparency' features to show what stage of approval a course is at.

Item 5. Skills Funding Agency funding policy

- 5.1 Nick Chomyk from the Skills Funding Agency spoke to the group. Nick is responsible for writing documents on learner eligibility documents and the funding calculation.
- 5.2 Nick commented that he was pleased to see that electronic evidence was specifically mentioned in Guidance Note 7. He said that he expected more guidance will be produced but it will be very short. The agency is likely to adopt the HMRC's approach, ie learning providers will be left to develop systems that work for them. The agency does not want to be too prescriptive.
- 5.3 It was suggested that learning providers will be reluctant to make full use of electronic systems because auditors at a later date might pick fault in what they have done and claw back funding. Nick suggested that providers seek comments on the robustness of their processes from external auditors and / or other learning providers who have successfully introduced these systems. Nick also highlighted that if there is a dispute between auditors and learning providers then the agency has a formal, independent dispute process that can be followed.
- 5.4 Nick talked through some of the simplification that the agency will introduce. The agency has already announced that it is moving to a single adult skills budget, with a single data collection for that provision. Colleges and local authorities will be paid on profile, with all other providers being paid monthly for the actual provision that they deliver.
- 5.5 Nick said that the provider factor will go but some form of area cost will be there. The need for disadvantage uplift is still being considered. Large employer discounts will still apply.
- 5.6 The agency plans to run a parallel system in 2011/12, which means that it will make available a mechanism for learning providers to see what funding they would get in 2012/13. In short, providers will be able to apply 2012/13 funding rules to their 2011/12 data to indicate what funding providers can expect next year.

Item 6. Learning Records Service

- 6.1 Mike Coulson from the Learning Records Service spoke about some of the benefits in version 5.1 of the Learner Registration Service. It now fully supports the Qualification and Credit Framework, credit transfers and has improved workflows for possible ULN matches.
- 6.2 Mike explained that a data warehouse facility has been developed and that this is enabling them to improve the matching algorithm.
- 6.3 The LRS is involved in producing an online identification verification system, known as the Learner Passport. This will enable learners with internet access to identify themselves online. It should replace the need for learners to have to show passports or driving licenses to learning providers. It should be possible for software suppliers to access plug in services to access this.
- 6.4 The group commented that what their customers really want from the LRS is for it to provide timely qualifications on entry. Mike was asked how long it will be until GCSE results are put onto the LRS in August each year. Mike's

response was clear that the LRS is doing what it can to encourage awarding organisations to use its services but they have no legal authority over awarding organisations to force them to do this. He pointed out that the Chief Executive of the Skills Funding Agency is meeting with awarding organisations to discuss these issues. It is already clear that part of the deal for having units funded is that the LRS is used as the key data repository.

Item 7. Single ILR Communications Plan

7.1 Paul Kelman talked to the group about the main communications that are planned to ensure that providers are fully aware of, and are prepared for, the single ILR in XML. The communication plan includes:

- Writing to all principals / heads of organisations and all MI staff
- Producing an online tutorial for front line staff
- Publishing the Provider Support Manual
- Speaking at conferences and events
- Running train the trainer events (for SFA/YPLA staff)
- Providing regular updates on deliverables through the usual channels (websites, newsletters)
- Possibly run webinars for providers

7.2 Some of the key messages to get across are:

- The drivers for the move to a single ILR in XML and the benefits
- Explaining the collection timetable and selection criteria
- Using the LIS tool to convert and amalgamate ILR files
- Using A and B files
- Understanding the new terminology

Item 8. 2012/13 ILR change process

8.1 Paul Kelman gave the group a very brief reminder of *the information authority's* ILR change process and the assessment criteria used to decide which requests should proceed. The group discussed submitting a change request to ask for the timely publication/release of all ILR support systems (LIS, LARA, PFRs etc.) to ensure provider systems are ready for the coming academic year.

Item 9. Information Standards Board meeting request

9.1 As part of a recent review of its special interest groups (SIGs) the Information Standards Board (<http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/>) has approved a proposal to set up a new software supplier group to:

- be kept informed about ISB standards development
- assist with the early identification of changing data needs
- participate in Working Groups of stakeholders developing new standards.

9.2 Paul had previously emailed the software supplier group to ask whether anyone had reservations about *the information authority* passing their email

address on to the ISB. It was agreed that the group members' email addresses would be shared with the ISB so that the ISB can communicate directly with software suppliers.

Action: Paul to share the group's email addresses with the ISB.

Item 10. Any other business

Item 11. Date of next meeting is 3 November 2011

DRAFT

List of attendees

Adrian Kilburn	Capita Education Services
Alan Billingham	The Data Service
Andy James	Corero Systems Ltd.
Andy Pointin	Monterpoint Ltd
Bernard Jauregui	KPI Gold LLP
Brian Mann	Capita Education Services
Colin Harris	Compass Computer Consultants Ltd
Darren Guy	Ecordia
Harry Tooley	HT Software
Huy Bui	Monterpoint Ltd
John Davis	Birmingham City Council
Kevin Atkins	Tribal Technology Ltd
Lisa Macdougall	<i>The information authority</i>
Luke Fitzgerald	Pellcomp (PICS)
Martin Cross	Drake Lane Associates
Martyn Taylor	Active Data Systems
Mike Davies	Unit4
Mike Wicks	The Data Service
Nick Chomyk	Skills Funding Agency
Nick Swift	Seetec
Paul Mann	Learndirect/Ufl
Paul Kelman	<i>The information authority</i>
Pete Hutchinson	Active Data Systems
Peter Adams	Pellcomp (PICS)
Phil Howe	Mindset
Rosie Coleman	The information authority
Sandylen Mootoo	Tribal Technology Ltd
Simon Howlett	Compass Computer Consultants Ltd
Steve Rash	Tribal Technology Ltd
Toby Milne and	Ecordia
Tony Howarth	Cognissoft Ltd
Will Horst	Plus Business Systems Ltd