



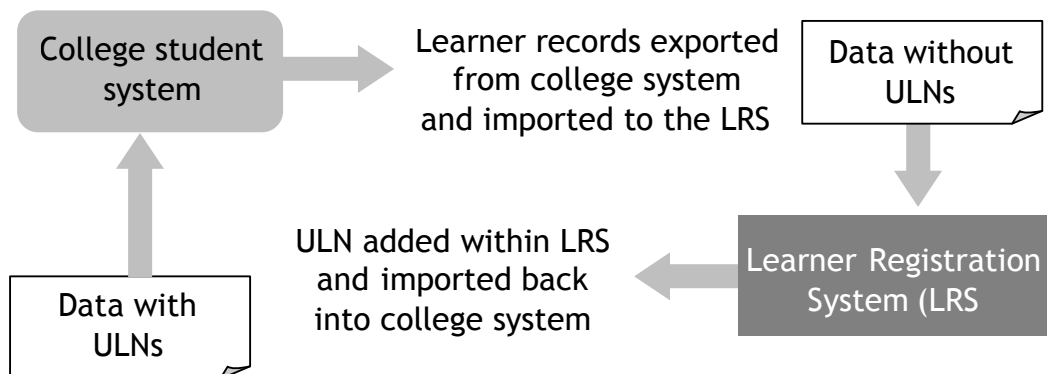
## ILR DATA QUALITY CASE STUDY

### BACKGROUND

In September 2006 Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) began the Unique Learner Number pilot, which all providers must now include for every learner within the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). The ULN is a 10-digit identifier issued by the Learner Registration Service (LRS). The LRS uses the number to index each learner's identity details, education and training qualifications within the Personal Learning Record (PLP).

Learners will retain the same number for accessing their PLP throughout their lives, whatever their level of learning and wherever they choose to participate.

### The ULN allocation process



This case study shares the experience and lessons learnt at Lewisham College, the first college to issue a ULN.

### THE COLLEGE

Lewisham College is a large and successful vocational college based in South East London. Judged as 'outstanding' by Ofsted in 2006, the college also holds four Beacon awards and was one of the first to be awarded the Training Quality Standard. The college's annual budget is around £38m, which funds more than 15,000 learners. There are 2,600 students aged 16-19, and around 700 14-16 year old schoolchildren who attend the college for work-related learning. The average age is 29 and 43% learners live in Lewisham itself with the majority coming from adjoining boroughs.

The first ULN (1000000000) was allocated by Lewisham College to Precious Igbinobaro, who was starting her second year studying a BTEC National Diploma in Care. Precious went on to achieve a Double Distinction Merit and is currently in her final year of a nursing degree at one of the world's top 25 universities, King's College London.

## THE NEED

In September 2006 Lewisham College was one of a number of providers participating in the ULN pilot. All learners within the college's School of Health, Care and Early Years would need to be allocated a ULN (the unique ten digit number assigned and validated by the LRS). Within a year this relatively small-scale pilot was rolled out nationally to all Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded providers, and now all 15,000 Lewisham College learners require a ULN for the ILR data to be validated.

## THE ISSUES

The college's student system was upgraded so that the required data file could be exported for the LRS, and imported with the ULNs. However, the requirement for a valid ULN for every learner within the ILR presented a number of issues and early teething problems:

### 1. Explaining the benefits to learners

It proved important that the learners were aware of the benefits of being assigned a ULN. Initially many learners were suspicious and whilst an ULN was assigned, they chose not to allow their data to be shared beyond their Personal Learning Record.

### 2. Collection and submission of valid learner details

Learner details, such as name and date of birth, were written by the learner on the enrolment form. However, many learner details were rejected by the LRS as the details did not match exactly with school data. For example, the learner may have called themselves Nick on the enrolment form, but the school data (based on birth certificate) says Nicholas. In this case the record would have been rejected by the LRS as a query, thus a ULN could not be allocated. This proved very time-consuming to resolve, as initially 60% of records were queried after the first LRS upload.

### 3. Volume and timing for assigning ULNs

It became clear that the volume and timing of uploads was important. Initially too many records were uploaded at once, leading to the system timing out. Also, if submitted too early some learner data would be incomplete, whilst submitting too late caused a problem for the Awarding Bodies, which link the ULN to their Unique Candidate Identifier (UCI).

## THE SOLUTION

### 1. Explaining the benefits of the ULN to learners

The college quickly realised that learners were suspicious of the ULN, and it was not enough to display posters and include a statement on the enrolment form explaining the benefits. The fee assessors were trained to explain the fair data process notice during enrolment, including the benefits of having a ULN. For example, learners are

made aware that it will be to their advantage if future employers were able to verify the qualifications they have gained.

## **2. Collection and submission of valid learner details**

The college changed the application requirements, so that all potential learners now need to present a valid passport or birth certificate at enrolment. This was to ensure that enrolment data, such as the learners name, would be exactly the same as that held on official documents.

Alongside data quality training for enrolment staff, an additional section was added to the enrolment form, so that fee assessors could identify any outstanding evidence. Statements were added to the enrolment section of the website, making it clear that these would be required and a paragraph was also added to the pre-enrolment letter explaining the new evidence requirements.

## **3. Volume and timing for assigning ULNs**

It became clear that the ideal maximum number of learner records to upload to the LRS was between 500-600. Any more than this in a single upload and the system had a tendency to time out.

The timing of the first upload to the LRS after the main enrolment in September was also important. There is a tendency to want to wait, such as just before the ILR F01 submission in December, to ensure the data is as accurate as possible. However, it quickly became clear that it would be advantageous if the ULN was included in awarding body candidate registrations, particularly for BTECs and 14-19 Diplomas, due on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October. Therefore, the college schedules the first upload to the LRS in the second week of October (approximately 12 uploads in one day of 500-600 records each) to ensure all ULNs for September enrolments are assigned within the ILR F01 and as part of awarding body registrations. After mid-October ULNs are assigned on a monthly basis during the year.

## **EVALUATION**

### **1. Explaining the benefits of the ULN to learners**

Very quickly the number of learners choosing to opt out of sharing their data (ticking the 'do not share my personal data' box on the enrolment form) fell significantly. Initially only 63% permitted the sharing of their data. This has now risen to 97%, simply as a consequence of explaining the ULN benefits at enrolment.

### **2. Collection and submission of valid learner details**

The changes in the evidence requirements were positively received by staff and learners. Within a relatively short space of time the number of records queried by the LRS after the first submission fell from 60% to 5%.

### **3. Volume and timing for assigning ULNs**

The upload of 500-600 records at a time proved to be the optimum figure, and making the first upload in the second week in October has proved successful.

## **BENEFITS**

### **1. Explaining the benefits of the ULN to learners**

There is a long term benefit to the learner, in terms of making best use of their Personal Learning Record. Also, the fact that they have permitted use of their data means that they can be contacted in future. This is particularly important for the purposes of surveys and customer feedback, such as via Framework for Excellence.

### **2. Collection and submission of valid learner details**

The obvious benefit has been that in 95% of cases a ULNs can be allocated through electronic data interchange, without requiring any further investigation or manual entry onto the LRS. This has saved a significant amount of administration time and effort. It has also reduced the potential for future errors or inaccurate data.

A significant benefit has also been that when learners present official documents for exams, their personal details match the awarding body registration details. Previously where these differed a replacement certificate would be required, creating delays for the learner and considerable administration costs for both the college and awarding body. By collecting personal data from official documents at the point of enrolment last year the college saved more than £10k in replacement certificate fees.

### **3. Volume and timing for assigning ULNs**

Uploading records in smaller batches of 500-600 has avoided the LRS system timing out. Also, ensuring that awarding bodies such as Edexcel know the ULN at the time of candidate registration is increasingly important to keep track of learner records. This will also be of benefit as learners navigate their way between awarding bodies within the new Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF).

## **TO FIND OUT MORE**

For further information please contact Lesley Fooks, Head of Student Administration at Lewisham College on 020 8694 3258 or [lesley.fooks@lewisham.ac.uk](mailto:lesley.fooks@lewisham.ac.uk)

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