

# Minutes

<b>Date</b>	24 March 2011
<b>Subject</b>	LR provider group
<b>Location</b>	Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry
<b>Time</b>	11am until 3:45pm
<b>Publication intent</b>	PUBLIC DOCUMENT

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**Present** The list of attendees is at the end of this document.

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

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

- 2.1 Paul Kelman ran through the actions from the last meeting. The group had asked *the information authority* to extend the Provider specified learning aim data field (field A48) for the 2011/12 ILR. This has been done. In the flat-file version of the ILR it is field A72.
- 2.2 The group had asked *the information authority* to clarify what destination data is expected for Learner Responsive provision. Anita Holcroft confirmed that the providers are only expected to complete destination data for LR learners if they have been specifically asked to do so by the ESF team. Some members of the group commented that the requests to collect this information come in far too late.
- 2.3 Paul also fed back the main themes from the meeting evaluation sheets which group members completed after the LR provider meeting in November 2010. Overall, the feedback on the usefulness and structure of the meetings is very positive. Group members appreciate the opportunity to get early notification of developments and have the chance to influence things. It was agreed that the timings of the meeting are about right and so the meetings will continue to start at 11am.

### **Item 3. Section 96 LAD issues and proxy aims**

- 3.1 Christina Ficini from the Young People's Learning Agency attended to answer any queries on the funding for 16-18 year olds.
- 3.2 Paul informed the group that the view from the Skills Funding Agency is that they are confident that the funding information on the Learning Aims Database (LAD) was up to date before Christmas and has been kept up to date since then. From the Young People's Learning Agency's point of view,

the majority of information was updated mid-February and outstanding information uploaded early March. Several group members challenged this view and cited examples of aims that had been outstanding for some time and only very recently made available for funding on the LAD. The group also suggested that there are some QCF aims that are approved for 16-18 year olds but not for adult learners, even though the aims seem more targeted at adults.

- 3.3 *The information authority* is aware that more than 200 learning providers still had proxy aims in their LR02 data submissions. The authority will soon start to remind providers that these proxy aims will need to be addressed.

**Action: Group members to email [Paul.Kelman@theia.org.uk](mailto:Paul.Kelman@theia.org.uk) with any problematic aims. Paul will take them up with the Skills Funding Agency. [Christina.Ficini@ypla.gov.uk](mailto:Christina.Ficini@ypla.gov.uk) will handle any queries regarding 16-18 aims.**

- 3.4 Christina was asked about the future funding of the Electrotechnical 2330 qualifications and the Wolf Report.

**Post meeting update from Christina:** *The current position is that we are awaiting the cross government response to the recommendations in the Wolf Report which cover a broad range of areas. Some will be easier than others to implement and many are interdependent. Our assumption is that the Department will need to consider their combined impact, and how best to take them forward, before they publish a formal Government response to the Report. They will also need to think carefully about any funding implications.*

*As part of this, we understand that the Department is gathering information at this stage about the NQF qualifications which may fall into the scope of recommendation 23. Therefore while we understand the need to provide information as early as possible, we are not yet in a position to comment on the future funding of these qualifications. In the meantime we are forwarding any queries that we receive from stakeholders to relevant contacts at DfE and as soon as we have any more information, we will provide an update.*

#### **Item 4. The single ILR in XML, Data Service system replatforming and the impact on providers**

- 4.1 Lisa Macdougall provided an update on the Data Service's system replatforming. This project will enable the Data Service use more flexible systems that are better able to handle changes. The Learning Aims Database will be replaced with the Learning Aim Reference Application (LARA). The Learner Information Suite (LIS) will include a tool that will enable providers to convert a flat file ILR into XML. LIS will also enable providers to combine ILR files.
- 4.2 Lisa pointed the group to the [project pages on the Data Service's website](#). The webpage provides key dates for this project which include:
- LARA going live on 30 June 2011
  - LIS being deployed on 15 July 2011
  - the online data collection system going live on 14 July 2011
- 4.3 Lisa informed the group that *the information authority* and Data Service have been meeting at least monthly with software suppliers and providers who write their own software. These groups are getting early sight of draft

- documentation, data table structures and the XML schema to help them prepare provider software systems for these changes.
- 4.4 The group wanted to be clear what the differences will be between the old and new systems. For example, for the LIS and LAD the group would expect to see an overview of what these tools will continue to do, what they will no longer do and what additional functionality they will provide. The group particularly want to be consulted on the future need of LIS reports.
  - 4.5 The group would like clarification on where 2011/12 funding information will be held. The Data Service proposes to update the LAD with 2011/12 information until LARA goes live. At that point the LAD data will be frozen but remain accessible until at least July 2013. The expectation is that the course code used in LARA will match the LAD code. Once LARA is live, it will be the database that providers should refer to for learners in 2011/12. The group perceive this to be an awkward solution.
  - 4.6 There was some discussion around funding calculations. The expectation is that the two funding agencies will use different calculations and so LIS will handle both. The funding methodology for 2011/12 is likely to be similar to 2010/11. The Skills Funding Agency are likely to make significant funding methodology changes in 2012/13. These will be influenced by the consultation that the Department for Business Innovation and Skills held in 2010.
  - 4.7 Lisa talked through her presentation slides on the single ILR in XML. She described the data model. The group wanted reassurance from *the information authority* that learning providers will continue to be consulted on what data will be collected. The comment was made that data items that fit well into a data model and look easy to collect, may not be so simple to collect from a provider point of view. Lisa reiterated that any change to the ILR will still have to go through the annual change process and that consultation with the sector is a vital part of that.
  - 4.8 One of the benefits of using XML is that it is possible to record multiple occurrences within a field. The example Lisa gave is capturing LLDD and health problems. In the flat file format, a learner with both visual and hearing impairments would be coded as having 'multiple disabilities'. XML could allow each disability or learning difficulty to be returned. However, it should be noted that for 2011/12 this functionality will not be enabled.
  - 4.9 In 2011/12 all data returns must be made in XML. However, for 2011/12 only, it will be possible to create a flat file ILR and convert it into XML using the LIS. Lisa suggested that the XML element of this project should be the one that has the least impact on learning providers because software suppliers will make the necessary changes to provider MI systems.
  - 4.10 There is a mapping document to show where the old L and A fields are in the new data model. It is recommended that MI managers get used to the new terminology. Tools such as the LIS and OLDC will use the XML element names rather than L or A codes.
  - 4.11 Lisa informed the group that the move to a single ILR return for 2011/12 means that providers will be able to use only one method for returning data to the Data Service. For 2011/12, providers will not be able to submit data using both the Provider Online (POL) system and by batch return. This caused

concern to some group members. In some cases, large providers may have pockets of their business delivering small scale ESF provision and using POL to return their data.

- 4.12 Throughout Lisa's session, the group were asked to flag up issues and queries that they would like to see addressed in any future guidance or training for the single ILR. The issues and questions raised were:
- How will the LAD to LARA transition happen? What will the differences between the two systems be?
  - What will the changes mean for enrolment staff?
  - If a learning provider group currently has multiple UPINs, must they move to a single UPIN and update the UKRLP/Edubase?
  - How will validation errors be handled? For instance, will it be possible to list errors by funding stream or sub-contractor?
  - What will the process be for deleting learners?
  - What will the impacts be on internally written reports?
  - Will there continue to be census / reference dates? Currently some of the LIS calculations use census dates.
  - What are A and B files? How do they work and why / when would a provider use them?
  - Will organisations such as Ofsted continue to compare the equivalent of LR02 and LR05 when looking at a provider's provision?
  - Will all data freezes be made available to the providers as well as data users?
  - Will the data portal be open over the weekend?
  - Will all reports, such as the Provider Funding Reports, continue to be provided?
  - Merging learners – what will happen if a learner's record cannot be merged by the LIS? Can the LIS produce a report detailing which learner records have / have not been merged?

**Action: Group members to email any other queries to [cst@theia.org.uk](mailto:cst@theia.org.uk)**

### **Item 5. QAA data requests**

5.1 Matthew Cott from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) gave a presentation on QAA's role in relation to Access to Higher Education courses (Access to HE). He explained that QAA has a remit to advise governments on Access course recognition and that this the main reason why the QAA gathers and publishes statistical data on Access to HE courses and learners. In this context he noted that Access to HE supports some of the Government's current policy priorities for Higher Education which include:

- increasing social mobility
- extending fair access to HE and the professions
- attracting a higher proportion of students from under-represented groups
- the Government also wants to support mature students

- effective collaborative work on widening participation
- 5.2 Matthew highlighted the growth in demand for Access to Higher Education courses in recent years and the increase in achievement. QAA chairs an inter-agency data group involving the Data Service, UCAS, HESA and HEFCE to monitor whether these learners apply and go on to achieve in HE. The group expressed a concern about the future of Access to HE courses given the new fee structures for both Higher Education and Further Education. Some colleges are already considering whether these courses will be financially viable for them in future years.
  - 5.3 Part of QAA's role is to regulate and license awarding organisations that offer Access to HE courses. These awarding organisations, known as Access Validation Agencies, are required to submit information to QAA on 1 December each year. As well as data and statistics, the AVAs are asked to provide additional information as part of a self-assessment.
  - 5.4 Although a key part of the self assessment is data related, QAA does not specify how AVAs must collect it from learning providers. The expectation is that the data requested should be available from LR04 ILR returns. LR04 has historically been used because of its closer timing to the end of the academic year being reported on. The group pointed out that LR05 now closes in November and would provide far more robust data in terms of learner achievement and may also have some destination data.
  - 5.5 The group are frustrated that the AVAs contact providers directly to request data. The group pointed out some of the flaws in this approach. If providers are asked to complete a spreadsheet, it will not have any data validation or data definitions. Handling data requests like this creates additional burden for the learning provider. There is no guarantee that the data request is handled by the provider's MI team. In some cases it may be curriculum managers who complete the spreadsheet. As a result, the information provided to AVAs may not correspond with the data submitted via the ILR. It was pointed out that the expectation in the FE system is that data users make use of existing data where possible. As the information needs of AVAs could be met by ILR data, the AVAs should request their data directly from the Data Service.
  - 5.6 Matthew acknowledged these points and explained that QAA has identified some AVAs to pilot the use of ILR data. In the next few months, the AVAs in the pilot will work with the Data Service to retrospectively compare the data they received directly from providers with ILR data.
  - 5.7 The group's view on this is that regardless of any discrepancies they may pick up, the ILR is the official, auditable dataset that is signed off by the Principal / Chief Executive as an accurate account of the learning provision that has been delivered. Therefore, the group's strong recommendation to QAA is to use ILR data. It will give a far more accurate and nationally consistent picture of what is going on when compared with data gathered by completing an ad hoc request via a spreadsheet. Several group members are happy to volunteer to support this pilot so that they can get this data request right in future years.
  - 5.8 The group asked whether QAA or the AVAs could give anything back to providers. Perhaps sharing some reports on local provision or destination data for their learners. Matthew explained that the two annual QAA

publications: Key Statistics and the Joint Agency report (available on [www.accesstohe.ac.uk](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk) ) were the main ways in which QAA gives back to providers and others with an interest in Access. QAA also hosts an annual conference to which providers are invited where these two publications are launched, and Access Validating Agencies also provide feedback to providers in their own forums.

- 5.9 Matthew agreed that QAA would be represented at the next meeting to provide feedback on the pilot.

**Action: QAA to be invited to attend the next meeting.**

## **Item 6. High cost Additional Learner Support data**

- 6.1 Jacqui Longley and Clare Charlesworth from the Young People's Learning Agency spoke to the group about funding for learners with LDD. Currently it is split across the ALS and LLDD budgets, each with its own unique set of rules, regulations and recording methods. In order to ensure that the funding reaches the learner the YPLA need to plan, year on year, the learner numbers, costs and where they are learning. This involves the use of historical data from the ILR, LLDD database and local authorities as well as dialogue in relation to forward planning.
- 6.2 With increasing participation across these groups and greater levels of locally delivered specialist provision, it is vital to understand patterns of delivery and costs and to ensure consistency in planning, contracting and reporting. This approach has led to a number of data requests in relation to planning. *The information authority* has requested a timetable of the key data requests and collection timetables over the forthcoming year. A draft timetable of what is to be collected from each type of provider was circulated to the group prior to the meeting.
- 6.3 There was some discussion around what data is already returned in the ILR. The data collected in ILR field L29 (Additional learning support) is an estimate based on the provider's view at the time of enrolment. That is used to help decide who will fund the learner and the data recorded in L29 should not be changed in year. The data in L31 (Additional learning support cost) should be an actual record of the costs and should be updated in year if needs be. The YPLA is aware that, when comparing LR01 and LR05 returns, there are major differences between the amounts specified in field L31. For that reason, it is very beneficial for providers to continue to adjust the figures in year to give the YPLA as accurate a picture as possible. Similarly the YPLA need to be kept informed of any late enrolments. The assumption is that most enrolments take place in August / September.
- 6.4 The group were broadly happy with what is being proposed in the draft paper. Although providers would like the reporting requirements presented in separate lists based on provider type.

**Action: the YPLA to add specifications to the proposed timetable and pass that to *the information authority*.**

**Action: *the information authority* to review the specification and then share it with learning providers and software writers.**

## **Item 7. Current ILR issues Q&A**

- 7.1 The discussion reverted back to the single ILR and has been minuted under item 4.

## **Item 8. Employee Authentication Service**

- 8.1 David Browne from IM Services spoke to the group about two factor authentication. An employee authentication service has already been implemented for Skills Funding Agency staff. The intention is to extend a version of this to increase the security of interactions between learning providers and IM Services. The issue has been raised with this group previously. The proposal at the time was to issue key fobs to specific staff at learning providers. After feedback from this group and further investigation, the proposed solution was found to be too labour intensive and the typical interactions meant that the level of security being suggested was not proportionate.
- 8.2 David is considering at a way of introducing a lighter touch version of the authentication service and so asked for feedback from the group on the number of superusers that a learning provider might have and who would be responsible for managing who had which levels of access.
- 8.3 The feedback from the group suggested that the number of superusers per provider could vary tremendously from 3 to 200. The group also gave examples of some of the frustrations with the current set up. These included passwords expiring without warning and existing users having to create new accounts for new systems. What would be welcome is a system where users could be given access to limited areas – for instance finance staff could only access financial reports.
- 8.4 The group were clear that if David needed any further assistance or suggestions, they would be happy to help outside of the meeting.

## **Item 9. Feed back on the Service Desk**

- 9.1 Elana Zivinsky, the Data Service's Service Manager, encouraged the group to complete the Customer Satisfaction Survey. Feedback is vital to help improve the service.
- 9.2 It was pointed out that providers submit a number of queries to the Service Desk and the satisfaction levels for each may differ. In such cases, Elana asked providers to allude to the query they are referring to in their survey response.
- 9.3 One particular issue that was raised is the complexity of getting changes made to the UKRLP. It is likely that more organisations will merge and so the Service Desk should have a clear process to support providers in making all the necessary UPIN and UKPRN changes.

**Action: Elana to investigate this suggestion.**

**Post meeting update:** *Elana has seen a draft document that the Skills Funding Agency is putting together to assist providers who are merging / changing. Providers can expect the agency to publish that in due course.*

## **Item 10. Prior Attainment data quality**

- 10.1 Paul Kelman explained that colleagues from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) have found that there are discrepancies between the prior attainment data returned in the ILR and the data that they get from their Prior Qualifications Survey. There is a bigger discrepancy for apprenticeships in comparison with other FE provision. BIS colleagues are keen to hear provider views on what may be causing these discrepancies.
- 10.2 The group initially commented that a bit more information is needed before they can provide better feedback. For example, it would be useful to know whether particular levels are problematic, what questions are being asked in the survey and how the survey is carried out.
- 10.3 The group's view seemed to be that full levels 2 and 3 are well understood by enrolment staff. Those levels are generally easy to determine and learners often provide certificates to back them up. Therefore, the view is that the data quality for those learners should be good. Level 1 is a bit more difficult to judge, not so well understood by enrolment staff and so the data quality there may not be so good.
- 10.4 For apprentices, it was suggested that some learners may be enrolled off site and so may not go through the campus based enrolment process. Also for some colleges offering more specialist provision, they may get learners referred from other regions. Often colleges get data feeds for these learners which includes their prior attainment.
- 10.5 Another major issue raised is that the ILR specification is clear that prior attainment should remain the same for the duration of a learner's time at that provider. Therefore, a learner may have no prior qualifications on first entering a college but then gone on to achieve a full level 2 before starting an apprenticeship. In cases where the learner continues to attend the same college, the college's ILR would continue to show no prior attainment. The expectation being that it can be derived centrally from previous ILR data if needs be. If the learner is asked in a survey what their prior attainment was before starting the apprenticeship, they would say level 2 but the ILR file for that learner would say they had no prior attainment.

**Action: Paul to feed this back to BIS and contact the group again if BIS would like any further comments.**

## **Item 11. Update on 'Improving the User Experience'**

- 11.1 Paul informed the group that Fraser Hamilton, a usability expert, has been brought in by IM Services to make recommendations on how to improve the services currently offered to learning providers. To inform this work, Fraser has already visited a dozen or so learning providers. This includes colleges, private training providers, sixth form colleges, independent specialist colleges and local authorities. Several of the providers visited are members of the LR provider group. Fraser is very appreciative of the time that providers have given him and said that it has been invaluable to speak to providers and see what they do.

11.2 Although Fraser has not yet started to analyse all of the information gathered thus far, there are a few key themes that he has already picked up. These include:

- The need to bring the different websites and applications together, or at least improve the linking between related information and tasks. For example bringing together the LIS, the LAD, the OLDC, the ILR specification, the calendar with dates of returns, and announcements into one place would be good.
- The need to notify providers whether there are errors with their returns after they have been submitted to the OLDC, rather than providers having to check.
- Many screens and pages can be made more usable: easier to learn, use and remember how to use a year later. For example, the list of 'Completed returns' on the OLDC is not well ordered - the list of returns in there is fairly random, whereas they could be ordered by year and/or type.
- Handling possible ULN duplicates is a real problem for providers
- It has been eye-opening to see how much the providers rely on the Access database tables (from the LIS). They will need to have access to these tables, even in the XML world, as they support many critical business processes and other systems.

**Action: the group to receive further feedback on Fraser's work at the next meeting.**

## **Item 12. Any other business**

12.1 Alex Cook, the YPLA's Funding Implementation Manager, informed the group that he is currently working on the 16-18 Learner Responsive funding calculation for 2011/12. The calculation will be based on policies that have already been put in the public domain. The LIS for 2011/12 will have the 2011/12 funding calculation in it.

12.2 The expectation is that the funding methodology for 2011/12 will be similar to 2010/11.

12.3 The group expressed concern about the likely divergence between the YPLA and the Skills Funding Agency in terms of their data requirements. Alex commented that the funding policy staff at the YPLA and Skills Funding Agency do communicate but as they are now distinct organisations, working for different government departments, it is inevitable that there will be differences.

12.4 Alex informed the group that the additional disadvantage and ALS funding as a result of the re-investment of some unit cost savings is incorporated within each provider's allocation. However, any funds to replace the Education Maintenance Allowance will not be included in that.

12.5 There was a discussion the validation rules for 16-18 year old learners on two year courses who become 19. The funding model stays the same but providers should switch the source of funding to the Skills Funding Agency. Alex is concerned that this is not happening at all providers.

**Action: Alex to meet with *the information authority* to discuss this further.**

### **Item 13. Dates for future meetings**

13.1 The next meeting date was due to take place on 23 June but will be rescheduled. This is because the previous date was very close to the Nilta Conference (21-22 June) and the closing date for 2012/13 ILR change requests (24 June).

13.2 The next meeting will take place in Coventry on **Thursday 14 July**, starting at 11am.

DRAFT

## List of attendees on 24 March 2011

Name	Organisation
Amy McHugh	CTS Training
Andrea Watts	Wiltshire College
Anita Holcroft	<i>The information authority</i>
Berengere Pele	IM Services
Chris Wilde	Peterborough College
Dave Keohane	IM Services
David Woodward	The Sixth Form College Farnborough
Graham Mort	Strode's College
Hollie Warren	CTS Training
James Medforth	South Devon College
Jon Cole	Mid Kent College of Further Education
Julia Goldsmith	Walsall College
Karen Town	Wakefield College
Lisa Macdougall	<i>The information authority</i>
Lyn Gadd	Lewisham College
Margaret Scott	Essex County Council Adult Community Learning
Mike Wicks	Data Service
Paul Kelman	<i>The information authority</i>
Peter Buckley	Tameside College
Peter Mudd	South Downs College
Rachel Jones	Burton College
Richard Wyszecski	Derby College
Rob Nodroum	Barrow Sixth Form College
Sandra Howell	Birmingham Metropolitan College
Sean Lee	Newcastle College
Steve Menear	Birmingham Metropolitan College
Sunny Patel	Data Service
Tanya Bedford	Peterborough College of Adult Education
Valerie Woska	Harrow College

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**Minute taker** Paul Kelman

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