



***The information authority***

Paper 4: LSC Data Burden Action Plan

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## 1. What are we asking the board to do?

This paper is to update the board on LSC progress and planned action to manage and reduce the data burden on providers, and gives early consideration to the wider context of the transition period into the Young Peoples Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency.

## 2. Background

In 2008 *the information authority* surveyed learning providers to gain a greater understanding of the administrative burden placed on them by third party requests for data. This report identified that providers had concerns with the amount of effort required to support LSC policies and practices. The LSC responded to this report in September 2008 and agreed at *the information authority* board to draft an action plan to address provider concerns.

## 3. Progress to date

*The information authority* data burden report indicated five key areas of concern with regard to the LSC's data requirements of learning providers:

- i. ESF
- ii. Train to Gain
- iii. ad-hoc data demands
- iv. inconsistencies in data audit requirements
- v. guidance for front line staff

As set out below, important progress has been made in two key areas – ESF and Train to Gain which should have a significant impact on data burden. Action is planned for (iii) and (v), while (iv) is the subject of a separate report to the Board.

### 3.1. ESF

#### Review with ESF the requirements under the regulation

The European Union recently relaxed the regulations governing ESF funding for education projects. As a result of this and in an effort to reduce the complexity and administrative overhead for the delivery of European Social Fund Provision the LSC has agreed, subject to confirmation, a new matched funding method with the European Commission from 2009/10. This new method would be based on the LSC using existing funding streams as reported within the ILR and remove the need for open competitive tendering. This would simplify the process of identifying potential matched funding learners and applies to the following funding streams.

#### Priorities 1 and 4:

- Entry to Employment
- Programme-led Apprenticeships
- Skills for Jobs
- Entry to Employment

- Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), with exemptions
- Local Employment Partnerships
- Employability Skills Programme

**Priorities 2 and 5:**

- Train to Gain
- Apprenticeships

The ESF short record has been removed for academic year 9/10 and incorporated into the standard employer responsive ILR return.

### **3.2. Train to Gain**

Summary: The LSC has recently completed a comprehensive review of the paperwork associated with the delivery of Train to Gain, resulting in a rationalisation of the process, and a reduction from 17 to four standard forms that can be consistently applied in all regions. The new working practices will be implemented during the current academic year, subject to *information authority* board approval.

In the medium-term *the information authority* is working to remove the need for separate paper-based forms relating to the ILR. The LSC will work with *the information authority* to achieve this for TtG.

#### Detail

Led by the national training provider A4E a group of 15 training providers, of mixed size and type, reviewed all the information required to enrol, progress and complete a Train to Gain learner and the wide range of documents that providers were using to capture this information. This group identified that a single provider could be using up to 17 different forms to record the information perceived to be necessary for a Train to Gain learner. The main recommendations from this initial group were to provide clarity around information requirement; consistency in application of audit principles and standardisation of the documentation required.

Following on from this, PriceWaterhouseCoopers were commissioned to examine the Train to Gain process from end to end to identify the opportunities to reduce bureaucracy and to streamline the processes and practices of the existing arrangements and to make recommendations for changes to support the planned expansion of the programme. The findings from this report were reflected in the LSC's "Train to Gain: A Plan for Growth" which made the organisation's commitment to reduce bureaucracy within Train to Gain one of the 4 priorities for the programme.

The Bureaucracy Reduction Group (BRG) has undertaken extensive scrutiny of the review of bureaucracy within Train to Gain. The BRG itself has taken evidence from its own members on key issues and invited input from front line workers of the scheme as well as the evaluation report and proposed actions from the LSC. In January 2008 the BRG agreed with the LSC a 10 point action plan which includes undertaking measures that would reduce the bureaucratic burden of Train to Gain on practitioners.

One of the key actions was the development of a set of standardised paperwork for providers. A Task and Finish group of providers was established to take this work forward. The Group has been responsible for

the production and trialling of the suite of four documents with supporting guidance which capture the range of information and data requirements. This paperwork has now been updated to reflect the new SME flexibilities announced for January 2009.

The production and release of the paperwork was part of a commitment to John Denham in Dec 2008 regarding the reduction of bureaucracy within Train to Gain and with respect to the new SME flexibilities in particular.

## **4. Planned Action**

### **4.1. Ad-Hoc Reporting**

The response of the LSC showed a gap in perceptions between providers and LSC regarding the number of ad-hoc data demands.

LSC proposed action:

- (i) The LSC will work with *the information authority* and the Data Service to produce and publish a more comprehensive data collection calendar for 2009/10 academic year, together with the rationale for all standard data requests. This would be wider than the current ILR collection calendar and include, for example, financial returns and Framework for Excellence
- (ii) The LSC will work with one or two partnership teams, as case studies, to identify ad-hoc requests and the reasons for them. This will allow the LSC to review whether those requests could be met using existing information or in other ways.
- (iii) The LSC will work with the data service to identify where regional partnerships teams would benefit from new standard reports being made available from central data collections.

This review will be completed ready for implementation by the beginning of academic year 09/10

### **4.2. Guidance for front line provider and LSC staff**

A number of actions are underway or planned across the Data Service, *the information authority* secretariat and the LSC.

- (i) *The information authority* and the Data Service, supported by the LSC, will be implementing a series of communications / awareness activities, via FE Connect, its corporate website, workshops and through its existing working groups
- ii) The Data Service is piloting a service helpdesk for providers in the North East region to provide support, advice and guidance to customers through a single national Service Desk. If successful, it will then be rolled out on a region by region basis during 2009 and is expected to be fully operational by the year end. The new service desk will replace the system currently operated by the LSC, through which providers contact either their local or regional LSC office to resolve data issues and to seek advice on data related matters. The aim is to provide customers with consistent and

reliable support, either at their first point of contact by telephone or e-mail or through escalation of the incident to the appropriate people.

iii) The Data Service, and the LSC will work together to establish clear guidance for local partnership teams, and regional offices with regard to third party data requests, such as connexions, and contact point. The LSC and the Data Service will endeavour to move such requests into the data service catalogue, supported by existing data where possible. The LSC will chair a regular meeting with national and regional representatives, and representatives of the data service to broker agreements with 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. This meeting process will commence by June 2009.

## 5. The Wider Context

The LSC is now entering a period of transition in the run up to the Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) in April 2010. The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) will be operational from April 2009.

It is a priority to ensure that core systems and processes run smoothly during the transition period to the new organisations. The establishment of the *information authority*, and more recently, the Data Service provide a more structured approach to managing and consulting on data requirements emerging from any new processes developed by the YPLA and the SFA.

The LSC is in the process of developing some principles of approach to the business cycle(s) for next year (the transition year). The underlying premise will be that of minor change, with change only if there is a failing in the system, or if major policy initiatives (for example the QCF) require supporting changes.

Additionally, the LSC will establish a technical review panel together with the data service and the information authority to ensure that, where possible, data requests to support the new organisations can be serviced with existing collections.

## 6. Next Steps

The LSC will be pleased to continue to work with *the information authority* secretariat to monitor the impact of the actions described in this report on providers to reduce data burden, and to report to the board on arrangements for the transition year.

## 7. Contact Details

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