

# Report

## Paper 8 - Connexions data

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<b>Audience</b>	<i>the information authority</i> board
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## Background and introduction

- 1 Oakleigh's independent 'Data Burden' report published in 2008 identified that data demands and learner tracking requests from Connexions services are perceived as a burden by many providers. As recommended, the secretariat developed a standardised format and collection timetable for Connexions data, which was agreed by *the information authority* board in December 2009.

## Purpose

- 2 This is an update following the board meeting in December 2009.

## Key points/issues

### Issues raised by the board in December 2009

- 3 The board raised concerns about fair processing and data sharing. The advice from the LSC's Data Protection is that this is an issue that each provider and Connexions service is responsible for agreeing locally. They must ensure that they have the appropriate data sharing protocols in place and that learners are made aware what was being done with their data.
- 4 The other query was whether the amount of data could be deemed excessive. The advice is that Connexions must be able to justify the need for every field in the dataset.

### The changing information needs of Connexions services

- 5 In February *the information authority*, Data Service and the DCSF's Connexions group met to discuss the Connexions dataset and the possibility of bringing the collection, processing and dissemination of Connexions data within the scope of the Data Service.

- 6 At that meeting, the Connexions group stated that they now want to revisit the dataset and also the timescales over which it is collected. Since work began on developing the standardised dataset, several new initiatives, such as Raising the Participation Age and the January Guarantee, will have an impact on the data that Connexions Services need. The original aim of the standard dataset was to get good information on offers made to learners before the start of each academic year. As this is only one of the challenges that Connexions now face, it may be better to revisit the specification to cater for these additional new requirements.
- 7 The Connexions group need better quality data in September, October and November to identify which learners have actually started and which learners were expected but have not turned up or have left. Connexions services are given F01 data by local LSCs but as this comes through in December, it is far too late to meet their needs.

## Using the Data Service to collect, process and disseminate Connexions data

- 8 The Connexions group were very enthusiastic about the idea of learning providers submitting data centrally, with individualised data being made available to Connexions services in a format that meets their needs. The current practice of Connexions services asking local providers to return data on an ad hoc basis is time consuming for both Connexions and learning providers. Connexions often find it difficult to get data on 'cross border' learners. The existing ad hoc data collection processes are increasingly unlikely to meet the future data needs of Connexions services.
- 9 The Connexions group want a rolling monthly data collection that picks up offers made as well as in year starters and leavers. If this was done, it may be possible to provide the YPLA aggregated data from those collections in September, October and November. It is recognised that the quality of data returned in September and October is likely to be poor. It is not known whether learning providers could or would be in a position to deliver this. Further work needs to be carried out, perhaps by *the information authority* working with Connexions Services, learning providers and Data Service on feasible solutions.
- 10 Using the Data Service would have the following benefits:
  - Reduced burden for both Connexions and learning providers
  - A central data repository would enable reports to be produced based on postcodes or local authority area. This would benefit the many Connexions services who struggle to get good information from neighbouring areas
  - Data can be submitted and disseminated securely
  - Colleges and national providers with obligations to return data to more than one local authority area could submit all their data centrally
  - Having an agreed data specification with basic validation should improve data quality

- MI staff could build the collections into their work-plans and would not have to handle ad hoc requests from Connexions
- The Data Service's Service Desk could support Connexions services and providers

## The Common Application Process

- 11 Another issue that has been raised since this work began relates to the Common Application Process (CAP). These systems have been introduced since Oakleigh's Data Burden study in 2008 and some colleges have suggested that CAP systems create unnecessary work for them. It would be useful for these systems to be harmonised and for the requirements on learning providers to be clear.

## Recommendations

- 12 That the dataset put to the board in December 2009 is re-worked taking into account new data needs and the issue covered in point 4. *The information authority* could do this by hosting a meeting with key stakeholders (such as Connexions services, learning providers, the YPLA, and the Data Service) to devise a dataset and collection process that would be acceptable to all. The aim would be to put something in place for 2011/12. The meeting should also cover the issues raised in point 11. The output from this work would then be reported to *the information authority* board in June 2010
- 13 That the board supports the proposal for the Data Service to collect, process and disseminate Connexions data
- 14 That the board suggests possible sources of funding for the Data Service to take on system are suggested

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