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News from *the information authority***Programme to improve ILR quality**

Following the publication of the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) 2009/10 specification in November, *the information authority* has begun a programme of work to ensure consistency of data quality in the 2009/10 collection cycle.

The data quality project will clarify and improve the guidance and support given to providers in making their ILR returns, with the aim of securing more accurate and reliable information in support of funding, performance and policy goals in 2009/10.

Work began at the beginning of December and *information authority* business analyst Nick Graham is currently consulting widely with stakeholders and providers on the range of issues and measures the project can address.

Nick said: “We are aiming to work with the sector to develop a consistent, clearly communicated, well-understood approach to data capture and are looking to promote the wider use of tools and facilities that can improve data at source to the benefit of all.”

If you collect or use data in the ILR returns or have views on data quality and Nick has not yet spoken with you, he can be contacted by email at nicholas.graham@theia.org.uk. The project will be rolling out from February 2009.

Workshop findings published

The key [outputs and actions](#) from the stakeholder consultation workshops held in late 2008 have now been published.

Among areas covered at the events were the Individualised Learner Record timetable and change process for 2010/11; streamlining learner documentation; reducing the burden of data demands placed upon providers; and improving data security.

Stephen Hewitt from Morley College, who was a delegate at the London workshop, said: “I really appreciate *the information authority's* consultative approach and the friendly and open manner in which the discussions took place. It was a great opportunity to put forward my views, listen to those of colleagues from across the sector and I look forward to seeing the key issues acted upon.”

Paul Kelman, Stakeholder Engagement Manager with *the information authority*, said: “We held four workshops during last November in Coventry, London, Newcastle and Sheffield which were well attended by a good range of stakeholder groups. They provided us with an ideal opportunity to gather feedback and ideas on many areas of the authority’s work.”

Developing the 2010/11 ILR

The process and timetable for developing the 2010/11 Individualised Learner Record specification has now been published on *the information authority's* website <http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/RequestforChange>. The Request for Change form and additional guidance will be added in the near future.

Paul Kelman said “Over the last few months we’ve been seeking feedback on last year’s process from the change requestors and those involved in the consultation phase. We’ve made changes to the process to address all of the key issues raised. I think stakeholders will notice real improvements in the process this year.”

2009/10 ILR validation rules and specification

Validation rules for the 2009/10 ILR have been made available a month earlier than in previous years and will be available to view or download at http://www.theia.org.uk/downloads/ilrdocuments/ilrdetail2009_10.htm from Friday January 30th. Early publication of the rules will give providers and their software suppliers more time to check their systems and to prepare for any changes that may be required.

Version 2 of the ILR specification will be published by February 20th to include updates on validation requirements.

Clarifying final F05 returns for 2007/08

The final F05 return for 2007/08 is due on February 6th 2008. This guidance will clarify to the sector how to record FE NVQ learners in the F05 for 2007/08 that have moved to the ER ILR return in 2008/09.

Although the success rate methodology for 2008/09 is still to be finalised, the Learning and Skills Council has stated that data coded as outlined below will be taken into account so providers are not disadvantaged.

NVQ learning aims that were FE funded in 2007/08 and continue beyond 31 July 2008, should be code as follows:

- In the F05 return of 2007/08 learners should **remain coded as 'continuing'**. **Do not** code as a withdrawal or transfer. The actual end date field, field A31, **should not** be completed.
- Return the learners in the ER ILR returns of 2008/09 - **do not** change any of the learning aim dates
- If possible, use the same Learner reference number (L03)
- It would be helpful to populate the Unique Learner Number (ULN) in the F05 return for 2007/08 as well as in the 2008/09 ER returns to enable easy matching of the learner across the ILR returns
- Enter code **101** in the National learning aim monitoring field, field A46, in the ER returns for 2008/09 to enable funding to be correctly calculated.

Data protection guidance

The [LSC](#) has created a [document](#) that provides basic guidance on data protection. Included within the document is signposting to other sources of guidance, which might also provide advice and support.

The document was produced after stakeholders in the further education system identified a lack general guidance on both data protection and data security. *The information authority* is now working with [Becta](#) to commission a piece of work to produce a similar guidance for the FE system on data security.

New vacancies

The information authority is in the process of recruiting to two posts that will help it achieve its goals over the next phase of its work.

These are:

- Communications and Marketing Manager to manage the communications activities across both *the information authority* and the Data Service. For more information call Anne Fessi on 024 7682 3325.
- Data Development Standards Manager to enable easier sharing of data and improved data quality and efficiency across the FE system. For more information call Pete Ashton on 024 7682 3701.

Both posts will be based at the LSC national office in Coventry. More information can be found on www.totaljobs.co.uk or www.jobsgopublic.co.uk.

News from the Data Service

Pilot for central service desk

Learning providers in the North East will be given the first opportunity to test Data Service plans to provide future support, advice and guidance to customers through a single national Service Desk based in Coventry.

A pilot to determine the efficiency of the new support arrangements will run in the region until mid – February and, if successful, will continue as a normal operation in the North East thereafter. It will then be rolled out on a region by region basis throughout 2009 and is expected to be fully operational throughout England by the year end.

The new central support function will replace the system currently operated by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), through which providers contact either their local or regional LSC office to resolve data issues and to seek advice.

“The aim of having a central Service Desk 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,” said Paul Stonier, Service Manager. “It will also produce efficiency savings.

“If the North East pilot is successful we will roll out the service in phases to the eight regions throughout this year. We expect that further education data support will be provided centrally across the whole of England by the end of 2009.”

Rich Williams, Head of the Data Service, said providers who have had early dealings with the new service desk had been delighted with the support they received. “We even had a box of chocolates from one provider as a thank you for excellent service. We all thought they were delicious.”

Data Service recruitment gathers pace

The next phase of recruitment to the Data Service has begun in earnest with 15 new roles due to be advertised in the next couple of weeks, firstly through Oracle for internal LSC candidates followed by external advertising through the LSC website.

The vacancies cover a range of roles including Quality Manager; Service Manager; Service Desk Advisers and MI Developers. The service also plans to advertise for its first Advanced Apprentice.

The Data Service has already recruited to 13 new roles, including all director posts, and will continue the campaign throughout this year. When fully operational by 2010, its headcount will be around 50 staff.

Rich Williams said the development of the organisation was now reaching a critical phase. “We are delighted with the staff we have recruited so far, both from the LSC and externally, but we now need to push on.

“The launch of the service desk pilot marks the beginning of the national roll-out of an improved customer service function. It is an important marker and reminder that our recruitment needs to reflect the fact that we will be fully operational within the next 10 months or so.”

First steering group working meeting

The first working meeting for the Data Service Steering Group comprising leading representatives from a range of further education organisations, will take place in LSC national office, Coventry on February 5th. Members are expected to agree their terms of reference, the role of the group in the development of the new service and to discuss measures that should be implemented to determine the benefits the organisation can bring to the sector.

Programme to close

The Further Education System Data programme, established by the former Department for Education and Skills and delivered by the Learning and Skills Council, will be formally closed down at the end of March having successfully established *the information authority* and the Data Service.

The programme’s remit was to set up and develop the two new organisations during their early formative stages as part of the drive to streamline the collection and dissemination of information and data for all further education organisations in England.

Reg Basimi, programme manager, said: “This was a very ambitious piece of work which posed many challenges and I am delighted that we have been able to achieve what we set out to do.

“The information authority and the Data Service are now moving towards full maturity and are already making a big difference in reducing the burden of data demands placed upon further education and training providers.”

About us

The information authority

The information authority was established in October 2006 to set and regulate data standards for all organisations involved in further education and training in England.

The authority has a decision-making board headed by an independent chairman and made up of senior representatives from across the education and training system in England. This is supported by a small operational secretariat.

The Data Service

The Data Service was established in April 2008 to collect and disseminate information as the first single source of data for the further education system in England. It will work closely with *the information authority* to streamline and improve the way information is collected and shared. Key principles of the service are to eradicate duplication; improve

collection and sharing; increase efficiency; assure quality and; provide new levels of customer service.

Funded primarily by the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and supported by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) at its inception, the new separately managed organisation will have developed by 2011 into a fully operational service provider working in the interests of the sector as a whole.



To find out more about *the information authority* and the Data Service, visit:

www.theinformationauthority.org.uk
www.thedataservice.org.uk