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Introduction

Welcome to the second issue of the monthly electronic newsletter *inform*, updating you on joint programmes and projects being delivered on behalf of partners.

We hope you find this latest news about data and information related work useful. Please pass the newsletter on to colleagues if you feel it may be of interest to them. If they would like to subscribe, they should register their interest by providing their contact details to fesystemdataprog@lsc.gov.uk

News from the FE System Data Programme

The FE System Data Programme involves the creation of an independent *information authority* and a pilot to test the concept of a national Information Service. The authority will set and regulate data standards for all organisations involved in further education and training. A full Information Service will collect, handle and disseminate information across the further education system. Working in tandem, the two organisations will streamline and improve the way information is collected and shared.

Independent Chair for *information authority*

Graham Jones, Principal and Chief Executive of Sutton Coldfield College, has been appointed independent Chair of the *information authority*. He will head a board of senior cross-system representatives that will set and regulate information, data and collection standards for all further education and training organisations.

Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, said he was delighted to announce the appointment this month.

“Graham Jones is a well known and respected figure within the sector and will have a pivotal role to play in improving FE data and reducing the burden currently placed upon providers. He will lead the work to streamline data and free-up resources to be concentrated on front line education and training”, he said.

“The creation of the *information authority* and the appointment of an independent Chair are a significant part of our reforms and our commitment to simplify and streamline the way data is collected and used across further education.

“The authority is responsible for setting and regulating FE data standards and the Chair will drive those decisions. Graham is the ideal person to provide the leadership necessary to achieve the right balance between improving the use and availability of data against the burden involved in collecting it.”

Graham Jones has more than 20 years experience in senior further education roles and is a former schools and colleges Chief Inspector; a regional head of the Further Education Funding Council and a regular columnist with the Times Educational Supplement. His appointment was recommended by an interview panel comprising senior representatives from the Department for Education and Skills; Learning and Skills Council; the Association of Colleges and an independent assessor.

“The creation of an independent authority made up of representatives from across further education and training marks an important step in the move towards self-regulation for the sector,” said Graham.

“In helping make the post 16 sector even more responsive to the needs of employers and learners, the authority has an extremely important job to do and I am delighted and proud to be asked to lead it as chairman.

“Accurate and timely data are at the heart of any good management and performance improvement system. My new task is to lead the authority in developing a system which offers a comprehensive and reliable information service that doesn’t overburden the staff charged with providing it. It should be widely respected and valued by consumers and manageable and sustainable for producers.”

Dr John Brennan, Association of Colleges Chief Executive, said: “We very much welcome the appointment of Graham Jones to the role of Chair of the *information authority*. His background and extensive knowledge of FE will ensure that he is extremely well versed in the issues the *information authority* will need to tackle. Graham’s track record gives confidence that he will provide the leadership that the authority needs.”

The *information authority* has been heralded across the further education and training system as an effective means of bringing focus and consistency to data collection and reporting. Further education organisations, including the Association of Colleges, have been instrumental in formulating the scope of its responsibilities and structure.

The new organisation has been established by the Department for Education and Skills, with support from the Learning and Skills Council, as an independent body to set and regulate consistent data standards for all further education organisations. It acts as a single gatekeeper for balancing need against burden in deciding what data to collect and report.

The authority’s board is made up of representatives from across the further education and training sector and is supported by a small operational secretariat. It receives its authority from Ministers and will be empowered by further education and training organisations through the signing of a protocol. It will be accountable to all organisations across the further education system for balancing the demand for data against the burden of collection placed upon providers.

Name change for Data Service

The pilot to test the concept of a Data Service has been renamed the ‘Information Service Pilot’.

The purpose of the pilot, which will begin operation in August, is to prove the concept and viability of a full shared service for the whole further education sector. This would be an independent organisation, working in tandem with the *information authority* to streamline data collection and its use.

The change of name reflects the early views of customers who felt the word ‘information’ rather than ‘data’ better captured the essence of what the new service is trying to achieve – providing improved information to allow customers to make better informed business decisions.

The pilot will only be concerned with learner information and establishing new and better ways of using it. Customers of the service will be those who provide information about learners and learning and those who use it.

‘Pilot’ Project Board convened

The new Information Service Pilot Project Board met for the first time this month to consider the structure of the service, its brand and the overall pilot project plan.

Members of the board include representatives from OfSTED, DfES, North London LSC, LSC national office and Barnet College.

Customer service is a guiding principle for the new pilot and the views and approval of customers will be vital in designing a framework for the service before it goes live in August.

information authority website launch

A new *information authority* website will go live at the end of May at www.informationauthority.org.uk .

The initial site, which will undergo continuing development, will contain background information about the authority board and secretariat; the board's terms of reference; the protocol to be signed by further education organisations; information about standards; Q&As; latest news; newsletters and contact details.

News from MIAP

Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) is about streamlining how information on learning and achievement is collected, handled and shared across the education sector so that excellent services are made available to individuals, employers and communities.

MIAP will be capable of issuing every person in education and training with a Unique Learner Number and enable the collation of a lifelong record of their participation and achievements that can be accessed through the internet. It will support this by delivering Common Data Definitions that can be used by everyone in the sector; and giving access to the UK Register of Learning Providers, containing details of individual training organisations and the services they provide.

MIAP offers new learner opportunities says AoC

The Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges has endorsed MIAP as an initiative that will bring more coherence to the education sector and improve services to learners.

Speaking to delegates at the recent AoC NILTA annual conference in Leeds, John Brennan said the programme would simplify the way in which colleges and training providers could help learners to progress through the increasingly complex paths open to them.

“At long last, through the DfES-led Managing Information Across Partners project, we can foresee the realisation of the long-held aspiration of a Unique Learner Number – a simple identifier through which a range of information about individual learners can be assembled and utilised to better marshal the services we offer - with consequent simplification of administration, better assessment of individual needs and better tracking

of the multiple and complicated ways in which learners access and use those services.

“While there remain many problems to be solved, it is safe to predict that the introduction of a Unique Learner Number will open up a whole new range of opportunities for improvement of our services – opportunities which can only be realised through the medium of technology.

“In a similar way, the creation of the *information authority* for further education offers, at the same time, the opportunity to bring these services together in a more coherent way than has been possible under previous management of the data collection system.”

Like MIAP, the creation of the *information authority* is part of a DfES led programme being delivered by the Learning and Skills Council on behalf of partners.

Learner Panel ‘positive’ about MIAP

Members of the National Learner Panel for Further Education, established last year following recommendations in the FE White Paper, received a presentation and attended workshops to discuss MIAP this month after asking to find out more about the programme.

The panel is representative of learners from all aspects of further education in the UK, with the age of members ranging from 16 to 75. The gathering in Birmingham provided the first opportunity to hear directly about progress with work to streamline the collection and sharing of information across education and training.

Dominic Knight, MIAP Design Team Leader, and Tim Barrett, MIAP Sector Change Manager at the Learning and Skills Council, gave a half hour presentation about the programme and attended workshops to discuss its implications.

“With so many other issues to discuss across further education, it was extremely heartening that the panel should choose and request to learn more about MIAP”, said Dominic. “It is a clear indication of how important the work we are undertaking is.

“The response from the panel was very positive overall and we were able to give reassurance about what concerns were expressed regarding the security of the system. We were able to say clearly that it will be protected and that they, as individual learners, will have control over its use.

“It was their first opportunity to contribute to MIAP and our first real change to engage with a truly representative group of learners in one place. They and we are keen to make this the first step in an ongoing relationship.”

Unique Learner Numbers for QCF

Participants involved in the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) tests and trials of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) have begun to receive Unique Learner Numbers from MIAP.

“This is a clear demonstration of our close partnership working and the relationship between the MIAP tests and trials and the tests and trials of the QCF,” said Tracey Matkin, MIAP Tests and Trials Manager.

“We are supporting the QCA by providing Unique Learner Numbers for people enrolling for QCF qualifications. We are also preparing to support Specialised Diplomas in the same way.”

A spokesman for QCA said: “The QCF IT team has been working with Newham College to set their learners up with individual learner achievement records. These records will record all the credit the learners are awarded within the QCF.

“Learners will be able to access their records online and email relevant sections to prospective employers or to other centres. The QCF IT team will be working with all projects in the tests and trials that involve learners to set up learner achievement records.

“A set of guidelines for centres, taking them through the process of setting up learner achievement records, including how they apply for Unique Learner Numbers, has been developed to support this work.

Learner Registration Service on track for launch

Development of the first phase of the Learner Registration Service is on course for launch in September, when early adopters will be able to register learners on the MIAP System for the first time.

Registration bodies will initially be invited to register individuals and their Unique Learner Numbers manually onto the system. From October, system to system links with MIAP will be established to allow the information to be loaded automatically.

User acceptance tests involving members of the MIAP User Group are planned to begin in June to ensure the service works effectively.

If you would like to subscribe to this newsletter, register your contact details at fesystemdataprog@lsc.gov.uk

To find out more about the information authority and MIAP, visit:

www.informationauthority.org.uk

www.miap.gov.uk