

inform

Issue 35 – March 2010

Inform is a monthly newsletter from *the information authority* and the Data Service, providing you with regular news and updates on our work. To subscribe to inform email: informnewsletter@theia.org.uk.

Launch of the hands-on guide to post 16 performance and data

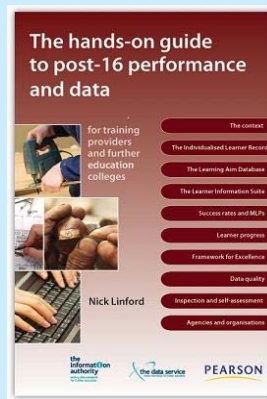
The Data Service and *the information authority* are working in partnership with Nick Linford to publish a new guide on performance and data, [The hands-on guide to post-16 performance and data](#).

Nick is also the author of [The hands-on guide to post-16 funding](#) and has spent six years as Director of Planning and Performance for Lewisham College before joining Edexcel in September 2009.

The book will be launched on 13 April to coincide with the College Data Conference, being held in London, at which *the information authority* and the Data Service will be speaking.

Nick Linford commented: "With the invaluable assistance of the Data Service and *the information authority* I have written this guide to help staff in post-16 education understand why data is important as well as how it is used to performance manage providers and individual courses. There are plenty of diagrams, images and worked examples which bring a potentially dry topic to life. Most importantly, it is designed to encourage reliable self-assessment and support providers in the process of continuous improvement."

The Data Service will be sending a copy of the book to each Employer Responsive and Learner Responsive provider. We recommend this book as a good introduction to the way performance is measured and data are used in the FE sector, so it will be of interest to many within the sector. Additional copies will be available to purchase from the [Data Guide website](#) in mid April.



This month:

- Launch of new data guide

News from *the information authority*:

- Update on the Learner Data Strategy
- Outcomes from the March board meeting
- ESF data fields
- Connexions data update
- 2011/12 ILR change process

News from the Data Service:

- Latest SFR published
- New Data Quality reporting tool
- Website changes
- 2008/09 Learner Responsive Success Rate outcomes
- LAD redevelopment
- Changes to Account Manager responsibilities
- New Service Director appointed

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News from *the information authority*

Stakeholders help to shape the Learner Data Strategy

Stakeholders have been contributing to the development of the FE [Learner Data Strategy](#).

In March 2009 the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), asked *the information authority* to undertake a broad review of the individualised learner record (ILR) to establish how well the ILR is meeting the current needs of the department. The review report identified; “The forthcoming machinery of Government changes, coupled with the changing nature in the type of data required to be collected by the ILR (and in the use of that data) mean that this is an opportune time to develop a learner data strategy for the FE sector including the data to be collected in the ILR, its structure etc. The strategy would inform not just the development of the ILR but developments such as the settlement system and the MIAP Learner Record.”

It was recently agreed that the next step for KPMG, the company that has been commissioned to deliver the strategy, was to hold discussions with stakeholders, rather than to deliver a draft strategy.

To achieve this, a series of six stakeholder workshops were held - participants included learning providers and provider organisations, as well as key FE data users. The outputs from these workshops will play an important role in shaping the new strategy.

It is expected that the near final document will be presented to the Learner Data Strategy project board at its next meeting in April 2010.

March board meeting – outcomes

[The information authority board](#) met on 03 March 2010 for its quarterly meeting.

The agenda included updates on the current plans for [Framework for Excellence](#), progress on the [Learner Data Strategy](#), changes to the specification of LLUK’s Individualised Staff Record (ISR) collection and demonstration of their new [OLAP tool](#).

The secretariat also sought permission to draw up a proposal that would allow a ‘window’ to be built into the deadline for submission of the final ILR data return (F05), which would allow providers to rectify genuine administration errors. The board agreed that such a proposal could be developed.

One of the main items of business at the meeting was the consideration of two late ILR change requests, which had been submitted by the Skills Funding Agency. Further details on these and the resulting decisions can be found on [the information authority website](#).

Details of [minutes](#) and [papers](#) from previous board meetings are also available on the website.

Measuring the benefits of removing ESF data fields

The information authority will soon be surveying learning providers to gauge whether the action taken to reduce data burden is making a difference.

The redundant European Social Fund (ESF) data fields were removed from the 2009/10 individualised learner record (ILR) specification. The small number of fields still needed to support ESF were moved to the learning aim data set and where possible were combined with existing fields.

The information authority's Paul Kelman said "The overall aim of this was to reduce the burden on learning providers. We're keen to find out whether the work that has been done in this area is actually having a positive impact. We're also keen to hear suggestions on how things can be further improved."

Meeting to discuss Connexions data

The information authority is facilitating a meeting on 23 April 2010 to bring various stakeholder groups together to discuss:

- The future information needs of Connexions services
- What information learning providers are able provide
- The benefits of having a centralised data collection / dissemination system and how that might look

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 learning providers. As recommended, *the information authority* has been working to develop a standardised format and collection timetable for Connexions data.

If you are interested in this meeting, please email cst@theia.org.uk for further details.

2011/12 ILR Change process – important dates

The change process for the 2011/12 ILR has been underway for a few weeks. Important dates in this change process have been [timetabled](#) and are available to view on [the information authority website](#).

The closing date for all change requests is 18 June 2010. The [criteria](#) and [change request form](#) are available to download from the [Request for Change section](#) of the website if you wish to submit a change request.

If you have any queries on the 2011/12 ILR change please email the information authority at cst@theia.org.uk

News from the Data Service

Latest Statistical First Release (SFR) published

The Data Service published its latest Statistical First Release (SFR) on Post-16 Education and Skills: learner participation, outcomes and level of highest qualification held on 25 March 2010. The SFR shows the latest performance against the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets on adult attainment and apprenticeships.

This SFR covers the number of people aged 16 and over who are not in school or university in England and who have taken a course funded by the Learning and Skills Council. The following key headlines have been extracted from the provisional data in the SFR:

Key headlines for 2008/09:

All ages:

- 1,449,800 learners were enrolled on Skills for Life qualifications
- 1,258,200 learners were enrolled on full level 2 qualification
- 795,800 learners were enrolled on full level 3 qualifications
- 4,836,700 learners participated in LSC-funded learning (excluding Higher Education and school sixth forms).

The overall success rate for FE-funded provision for all ages was 80.4%.

Early headlines for 2009/10

Early data for 2009/10 is still provisional and will be updated in the June Statistical First Release.

- 2,908,600 learners were in LSC-funded learning (excluding schools and Higher Education)
- there were 146,100 apprenticeship starts in the first six months of the 2009/10 academic year
- there were 63,900 apprenticeship framework achievements in the first six months of the 2009/10 academic year
- there were 250,600 Train to Gain starts in the first six months of the 2009/10 academic year
- there were 218,000 Train to Gain achievements in the first six months of the 2009/10 academic year

The full report and supplementary tables can be found at [The Data Service - Statistics - Statistical First Release March 2010 - Statistical First Release March 2010](#).

The next SFR will be published in June 2010.

Previous Statistical First Releases are available on the [Data Service website](#).

If you have any queries please contact the Service Desk on 0870 2670001.

New Data Quality reporting tool

The Data Service is working with *the information authority* to improve data quality across the FE system. To help achieve this, the Data Service is developing a tool that will generate data quality reports on a learning provider's individualised learner record (ILR) data. The reports will show whether the data meets the standards specified in [appendix P](#) of the ILR and, if applicable, will highlight any areas where a provider's data does not meet the required standard. The tool will also enable providers to monitor their data quality and compare themselves using national averages, regional averages, and 'provider type'. It will also be possible for providers to drill-down into the reports so that they can identify the specific learner records with data quality issues that need to be resolved. Providers will be able to use the provider-specified fields L42a and L42b to further tailor the reports. Data quality dashboards will be exportable for sharing with the provider's Senior Leadership.

The Data Service recently ran a workshop for volunteers from *the information authority's* [advisory groups](#) to gauge input on what they would like the tool to do. This was a very positive session, and a number of suggestions have been incorporated into the tool.

The aim is to deploy the tool in Summer 2010. The tool will be made available to providers initially as an Excel spreadsheet, uploaded to the Provider Gateway. The longer term aspiration is to make the features and functionalities of the tool available through the Data Service's Online Data Collection portal.

Important Changes to the LSC and Data Service websites

During the month of March there will be some key changes to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Data Service websites. From **1 April** the '[Providers - Data](#)' section of the LSC website will be hosted on the Data Service website. Access to news updates, provider software (Learning Aims Database, the Learner Information Suite), Provider Gateway, and various statistical information will be available through the Data Service website. The website will also have a new creative look from 1 April.

The LSC website will be decommissioned and no longer available from 1 April 2010, all users trying to access this will be redirected. The LSC reading room will continue to function, allowing access to LSC legacy documents through the new Skills Funding Agency and YPLA websites.

To be kept up to date on these changes as and when they happen please register for the [Data Service web alerts](#) service.

If you have any queries please contact the Service Desk on 0870 267 0001 or email servicedesk@thedataservice.org.uk.

2008/09 Learner Responsive Success Rate outcomes

Following a number of calls to the Service Desk by providers requesting a recheck of ILR returns against the new Learner Responsive Success Rate methodology for 2008/09, the Data Service published the following news item in the AoC NILTA newsletter on 05 March, aimed at addressing some of the concerns Colleges had on their success rate calculations:

“Changes to the Learner Responsive Success Rate methodology were implemented in the Learner Responsive Success Rate reports for the Academic Year 2008/09. These were published on 25 January 2010. At a headline level the outcomes were broadly in line with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) analysts’ prediction.

The Data Service has received a number of calls from providers asking for their ILR returns to be rechecked against this new methodology for 2008/09.

Having looked into over 20 requests from colleges, the Data Service has found that the reports are accurate and the methodology is correct in its calculation of success rates.

The LSC has provided software suppliers with this methodology to assist providers in reproducing their 2008/09 success rates if necessary.

If you have a query about your success rates please ensure that you have referred to your excel/csv extract (located within your QSR zip file) in the first instance. The extract details all learner records used in the production of your QSR/MLP reports - check the data in this extract against your own MI system to identify any discrepancies. Please note that the Data Service is unable to investigate your query until you have completed this reconciliation yourselves.

Please also ensure that you have checked the Quick Reference Guides and the FAQs before contacting the Data Service as these sources of information should answer the majority of queries you have. The Quick Reference Guides and FAQs can be found on the Data Service website here:

<http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0910/index+0910.htm>

Guidance for 2008/09 can be found here:

<http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/summary.htm>

If you are not able to resolve your query after following the above steps, please contact the Service Desk on 0870 2670001 or alternatively on servicedesk@thedataservice.org.uk.”

Redevelopment of the Learning Aims Database (LAD)

The QCF team within the Skills Funding Agency and the Data Service, are working on a project to redevelop the LAD for 2011/12 to better support the QCF, both Skills Funding Agency-funded and YPLA-funded provision and to update the existing platform to more current technologies.

The Data Service would like to engage with providers and software suppliers to better understand their current use of the LAD and gather suggestions for future improvements which will feed into the LAD redevelopment project. Providers and software suppliers can contribute to this discussion using the *information authority's community portal*, [feconnect](#).

A number of key questions have been posted about current and future use of the LAD, on feconnect, and we would appreciate as much feedback from the sector as possible on these areas. If you would like to contribute to the redevelopment process, then please post your responses to the [blog](#) on feconnect.

Changes to Account Manager Responsibilities: YPLA and BIS

In response to the Machinery of Government changes, there has been an alteration to the responsibilities of the Data Service Account Managers.

Stephen Green is the Senior Account Manager taking responsibility for the Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA) and the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Chris Bradley will be working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), with overall accountability for the Skills Funding Agency and the Department for Work and Pensions..

This will benefit the Data Service and their customers immensely, as there will be a single point of contact familiar with the entirety of the agendas for adults or young people.

These changes will take place from 1 April 2010. Those customers affected by the change will have individual handover conversations with both Account Managers.

If you have any queries please contact the **Service Desk** on **0870 2670001** or email servicedesk@thedataservice.org.uk

Data Service appoints new Service Director

The Data Service has appointed a new Service Director to replace Darren Bassett who has moved onto the Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA). Linda Smith will join the Data Service on 6 April. She has previously worked with Jaguar, Rolls Royce and EDS and has significant experience in strategic relationship management and service delivery.

About us

The information authority

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

The authority has a [decision-making board](#) headed by an independent chairman and made up of senior representatives from across the further 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 for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) 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.