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News from *the information authority***Connexions data – setting the standards**

Members of *the information authority* team met with colleagues at the DCSF responsible for the Connexions database, to discuss issues raised by providers regarding requests for data. There is currently no standard specification for Connexions data and some learning providers have expressed concerns over the frequency, lead time and clarity of some requests.

Connexions want to ensure that the Government's 'September Guarantee' of a place in education or training for every school leaver is met and they want to identify the number of young people not in education, employment or training. The DCSF's Connexions steering group has come up with a list of essential data requirements. The authority's advisory groups have provided feedback on that.

Paul Kelman, Stakeholder Engagement Manager, said: “We consulted our advisory groups on the initial draft and have since met with the DCSF again. We are in the process of redrafting the specification so that it fits in with ILR data fields that will already be used by providers. We will consult on that again shortly and report back on the outcomes in due course.”

Data users invited to new advisory group

The information authority is hosting a meeting on 27 March 2009 for key users of further education data. Organisations invited include the LSC, DIUS, DCSF, DWP, JCP, Connexions, HEFC and Ofsted.

“By talking directly to key users of further education data we will be able to get a much better insight into current issues and understand future information needs.” said Paul Kelman, Stakeholder Engagement Manager. “We run similar meetings for learning providers and software suppliers, which have really helped in raising issues and improving things for them and we think there will be real benefit in hosting a similar meeting for data users. “

If you would like to know more about the meeting please email paul.kelman@theia.org.uk. Details of *the information authority's* stakeholder consultation can be found on: <http://www.theia.org.uk/meetings-events/advisory-stakeholder/>.

Becta review data handling security guidance

Government agency, Becta is reviewing its [data handling security guidance for schools](#) to cover all sectors of the education system. This follows feedback raised in stakeholder workshops held by *the information authority* last year. Stakeholders commented that they would like to see a single point of reference for data security and data protection for the further education (FE) system.

The Learning and Skills Council has recently published 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.

Stakeholders are invited to read and comment on the current published guidance through a [collaboration area](#) on the Becta website.

Consultation regarding additional changes to the 2009/10 ILR

Providers and other stakeholders are to be consulted about two additional requests from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to change the individualised learner record (ILR) specification for 2009/10. The LSC has proposed that providers capture additional information relating to the learner's employment outcome and identify learners who become unemployed through redundancy during training. Given the current economic climate there is an increasing focus on understanding the relationship between training and employment. These two exceptional requests will be considered by *the information authority* board on 4 March 2009.

For more information on how to get involved in this consultation please refer to *the information authority's* website:

http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/RequestforChange/0910_ExceptionalRequest/

Request for change to the 2010/11 ILR

The process for requesting changes to the 2010/11 ILR is now underway and key documents are available to download from *the information authority's* website <http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/RequestforChange/>. Any requests for change need to be submitted on the "Request for Change" form between now and 26 June 2009. Later this year providers and stakeholders will be encouraged to share their comments on the proposed changes and more information on this process will be communicated through future editions of *Inform* and *the information authority's* website.

Paul Kelman said "My advice to anyone considering requesting a change is to talk to us as early as possible. We're always keen to hear ways of reducing complexity, so let us know if there are any low value fields that you think could be removed altogether."

The full timetable for developing and publishing the 2010/11 ILR specification can be found at <http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/RequestforChange/201011timetable/>.

Project to investigate earlier close for F05 ILR data

The information authority is running a project to investigate two requests that affect the close date for the final end-year learner responsive ILR return, F05.

The information authority board are to consider a request from the LSC funding team to bring forward the date of the final return for the learner responsive 2008/09 ILR, F05, to 15 January 2010 subject to a review of the earlier closing of F05 for 2007/08 on 6 February 2009. The purpose of the change is to enable the LSC to meet the needs of the further education (FE) system for earlier funding allocations for 2010/11. A hard close of F05 at 15 January will underpin the production of consistent end-year management information across stakeholders.

In addition DIUS has asked *the information authority* to look at a broader piece of work to investigate significantly bringing forward the F05 close date to allow the publication of FE achievement data in a similar timeframe to that for schools and the Higher Education sector.

Providers and other stakeholders are being consulted throughout this project.

Feconnect launches private discussion groups

[Feconnect](#), *the information authority's* online community portal now offers private online areas for stakeholders in the further education and training system to share best practice, raise data issues and have private discussion with peers. To join a group you need to be a

registered user and meet the group's entry criteria. If you have any queries, please email cst@theia.org.uk.

Website user survey underway

The information authority is undertaking some research into stakeholder views on its website <http://www.theia.org.uk>. The survey asks respondents to rate how user-friendly the site is and how useful the content is. Suggestions for improvements for the future are also invited. The survey should only take a few minutes to complete and the feedback will be used to shape future developments to the site. If you would like to take part in the survey please follow this link - [Website survey](#).

News from the Data Service

Data returns success

The Data Service reported a return rate of 100% from further education (FE) providers on their individualised learner record (ILR) F05 data for 2007/08.

The F05 data contained 3,171,111 valid learners and contributes to the final FE dataset which will be used for allocations, MLP reports and SFR publications.

Rich Williams, Head of the Data Service was delighted with the result: "I think this is a tremendous achievement and I would like to say a big thank you to everyone in the Local Partnership Teams and all of the providers who supported the Data Service in getting returns in before the close."

"We are working with *the information authority* to making public fixed end dates for all data returns to ensure a fast turnaround for analysis."

Supporting the 2009/10 allocations process

The Data Service Management Information team and Customer Managers have recently completed the remaining reports to support the 2009/10 Allocations process.

To date the following allocations data has been processed and supplied for use in the Learning and Skills Council's business cycle:

- School 6th form provider factors and learner numbers
- Final 16-18 and 19+ learner responsive provider factors
- Final standard learner numbers and participation volumes

Success rates reports published

Final versions of the 2007/08 Further Education Qualification Success Rates (QSR) reports and the Further Education Minimum Levels of Performance (MLP) reports are now available to download from the Online Data Collections website and the Provider Gateway.

QSR reports have been updated to include final F05 submissions, however the minor issue with the number of starts on “Total Short Qualifications” is still being investigated. The Data Service expect to resolve this within the next couple of weeks.

Service Desk pilot extended

Over the last four weeks the Data Service has piloted a Service Desk for providers in the North East. The pilot was due to end on 13 February but Darren Bassett, Service Director has decided to extend the pilot: “Given the useful information we have gleaned to date we will extend the pilot for a further 4 weeks. This means that the Service Desk will continue to be the first point of contact for our providers in the North East.”

If the pilot is successful the support provided by the Service Desk will be rolled out on a region by region basis throughout 2009.

Data Service Steering Group agrees terms of reference

The Data Service Steering Group, comprising leading representatives from a range of further education organisations, held their second working meeting on 5 February 2009. Members agreed their terms of reference which included that the group would hold quarterly meetings and remain active until September 2010. The process for electing a Chair was agreed and members have been asked for nominations. Members also shared their views on the core catalogue of services offered by the Data Service and these discussions will continue at the next meeting.

Bob Powell, Chief Officer of HOLEX chaired the meeting: “Despite the snow, we had a great turnout, bringing together key players from national agencies; DIUS, HESA, HEFCE and *the information authority*, and provider representative bodies. It was also good to see so many Data Service personnel, including some recent appointments. The meeting was incredibly constructive and gave a clear demonstration of how the sector itself is setting the agenda for the future. Everyone was very open in the discussions, and there was a real commitment from the group to finding a common agreement on how the Data Service can develop and benefit the sector as a whole.”

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.

Vacancies

The information authority is currently recruiting for the following positions:

- Data Quality and Improvement Manager: To lead the FE system in developing standards and agreeing the quality management framework that will meet the needs of the sector for improved quality of data
- Data Specification Developer: To develop the specification of the main learner data collection from FE providers, the individualised learner record and manage other discrete pieces of data specification work with stakeholders across the FE system
- Data Standards Manager: To lead definition of the standards for FE sector data and information to enable easier sharing of data, improved data quality and efficiency across the FE system

The Data Service is currently recruiting for a:

- Data Quality and Assurance Manager: To lead the FE system in developing and agreeing the quality management policies and assurance standards that will meet the needs of the sector for improved quality of data

For more information on any of these positions please refer to

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/vacancies/>



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

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