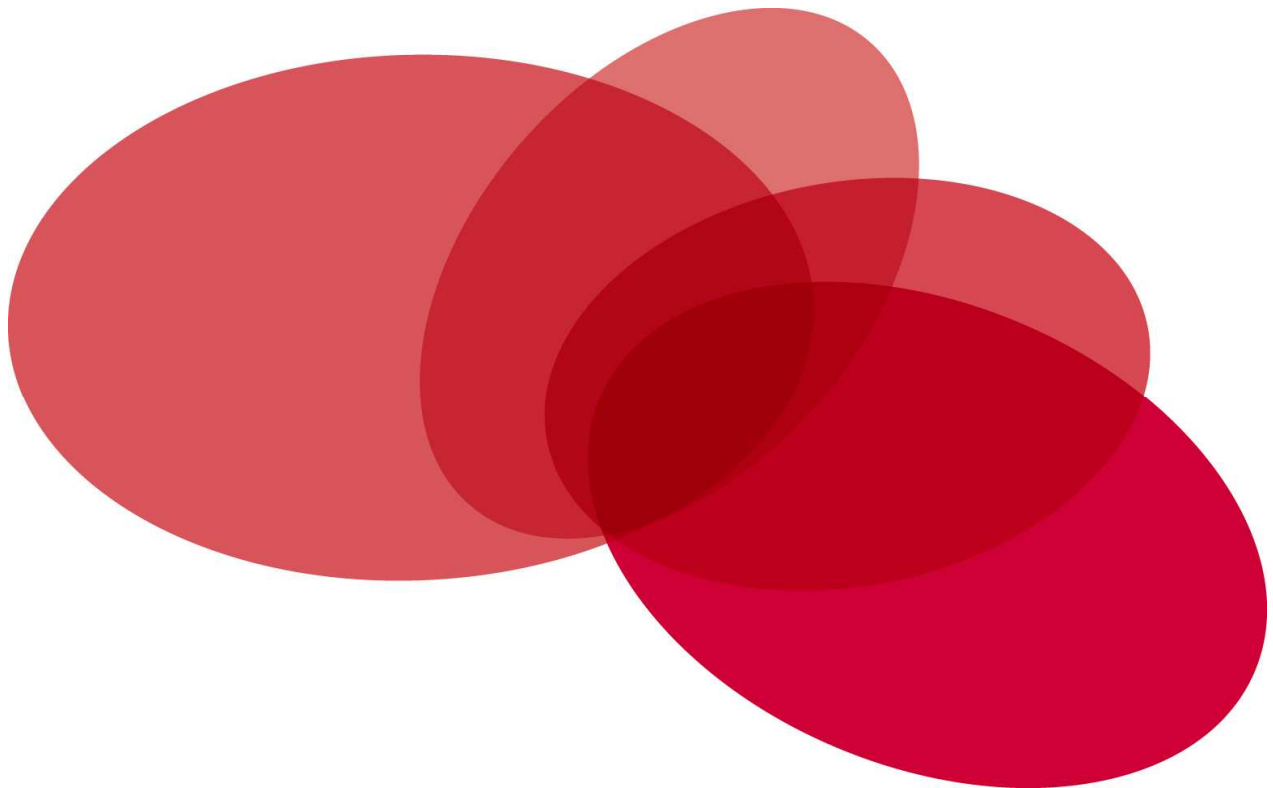# LESSONS LEARNT FROM WORKFORCE DATA COLLECTION PILOTS IN THE ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING AND WORK BASED LEARNING SECTORS IN ENGLAND

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 2007, Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the sector skills council (SSC) for lifelong learning took over the responsibility of workforce data collection in the Further Education (FE) Sector in England, from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This FE Sector in England, which forms a part of the larger lifelong learning sector, comprises Adult and Community Learning (ACL); Further Education colleges and work based learning (WBL) providers in receipt of public funds.

Workforce data collection is at the heart of the Workforce Strategy for the FE sector in England, 2007-2012, within which Priority 1 relates specifically to achieving consistent coverage and robust systems of data collection on the FE Sector workforce.

Workforce data collection had previously not been undertaken by the LSC in the ACL and WBL sectors. LLUK undertook 2 pilot studies in the summer of 2007 in order to understand the feasibility and logistics of collecting workforce data from these sectors.

The similarities in findings from the ACL and WBL sectors were many:

- Some basic or 'core' data about the workforce is held by most organisations, which is collected during recruitment
- Data is not always captured about all individuals
- There is a great variety between the actual data fields between organisations in the same sector as well as between the two sectors, thereby resulting in issues of comparability. Therefore, pre-defined data fields are not always the same as data fields used by organisations
- Data is collected in a variety of electronic and paper-based ways and in a variety of databases, which can take time to amalgamate
- There is a general sense of concern in relation to data protection and sharing of information

Based on the lessons that have been learnt from the pilots, LLUK intends to undertake a variety of actions including:

- Providing clear guidelines on the proposed nature of data collection
- Developing a programme of support, including information, advice and guidance
- Building in preparation time for providers and allowing for partial responses, where data is not readily available at the provider end
- Developing a user friendly, robust and intuitive data collection tool

LLUK's data collection tool is currently being built, guided by the findings and lessons learnt from these pilots and will be ready for deployment in September 2008.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 FE sector workforce data collection

From 2007, Lifelong Learning UK became responsible for the collection of workforce data in the Further Education (FE) Sector, which comprises Adult and Community Learning (ACL); Further Education colleges and work based learning (WBL) providers in receipt of public funds in England.

Workforce data from FE colleges only was previously collected by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and known as Staff Individualised Records (SIR). LLUK's data collection system not only takes over the existing SIR collection but expands to include ACL and WBL providers as well. This is deemed necessary to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the FE sector workforce, which will, in turn ensure that policy and planning decisions are based on a more complete and accurate understanding of workforce positions.

This collection of workforce data also relates to priority 1 of the Workforce Strategy for the FE sector in England, 2007-2012, which is about understanding the workforce. More specifically, it deals with achieving consistent coverage and robust systems of data collection on the FE Sector workforce; and transforming workforce data into intelligence and using it sector-wide to plan for and strengthen the FE workforce[1].

1.2 The ACL and WBL pilot studies

To explore scope for extending collection to the ACL and WBL sectors, two pilot studies were conducted involving ACL and WBL providers. The objectives of the pilots were to understand the feasibility and logistics of collecting workforce data from the ACL and WBL sectors so a national rollout could be undertaken from 2008. Some workforce data was also collected through the pilots, the findings of which have been reported separately.

This report provides a synthesis of the lessons learnt from the pilots, which ran from May to November 2007.

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[1] http://www.lluk.org/feworkforcestrategy/index.html

2. PILOT IN THE ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SECTOR

2.1 Background

A multi-stage pilot study was undertaken by ORC International, which focused on ways of promoting participation, the design of a suitable data collection tool and ACL workforce data analysis.

This pilot focussed on ACL providers, including Local Authorities and Voluntary and Community Organisations, and only organisations that receive funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are included. Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) which is a part of the larger ACL provision, and is provided primarily by FE colleges, fell outside this ACL data collection exercise.

2.2 Methodology

An exploratory approach was taken to inform the design of a data collection system suitable for use with the ACL sector, a sector from which workforce data had previously not been collected.

The research phase which contributed to the findings of this project included:

- 20 in-depth interviews with providers of various types and sizes
- Database compilation of ACL organisations that receive LSC funding: Details of approximately three hundred and fifty ACL providers were compiled using the Adult Learning Handbook published by NIACE; asking participants in the in-depth interviews for contact details of other local ACL providers/partners and; and a database of 2006 LSC contract holders. However, this list was eventually reduced to the 262 receiving LSC funding in 2007. Only rarely did an LSC-provider draw on other local organisations to deliver this provision.

2.3 Findings

- **Most organisations collect some 'core' demographic and employment-related data**
- However, beyond the 'core' data fields, individual providers collect data in a variety of ways. For this reason, there is enormous **variation between organisations in terms of what and how data is collected**. For example,
    - Gender data was missing (i.e. data field left empty) or recorded as 'unknown' for the remaining 22 individuals, which is just 1.2%.
    - Age data was submitted for just less than half of all individuals (865 or 46.1%). Whereas four organisations gave age data for every individual, five

organisations gave none at all. One organisation gave age data for about two thirds of individuals.

- Ethnicity data was provided for 1238 out of 1875 individuals; 66% of the total sample. It is worth noting that 'White British' and 'White' (if unspecified) appear to be used interchangeably by organisations and so these two sub-categories could be grouped together in future.
- On the payroll of an FE college: Only three out of 12 organisations submitted any data in response to this topic. No individual was identified as being on the payroll of an FE college.
- Highest qualification level: A surprisingly low amount of data on the level of qualification was submitted – 146 individuals or under 10%. On further enquiry, it seems that some organisations participating in the pilot data collection exercise do not routinely transfer this information from CVs of successful job applicants to databases. Any detailed analysis or conclusions about the qualifications profile of the ACL workforce that were based on the low numbers reported above would be problematic.

- There were considerable **concerns about data protection issues** and sensitivities about providing certain data areas, for example, salaries, which acted as a barrier to participation and only 10% of salary data was submitted.
- **Data is often held on more than one database** (by HR and ACL delivery Managers), which participants found problematic to draw together (for technical, collaborative working and confidentiality reasons). HR departments, not ACL delivery Managers, hold employment data. For HR Managers to participate, they appeared to need instruction/ permission from a senior colleague in the organisation.
- **Data is often not collected for all individuals**

3. PILOT IN THE WORK BASED LEARNING SECTOR

3.1 Background

Undertaken by Pye Tait, this pilot sought to obtain information about providers' current methods of data collection - the type and nature of workforce data, methods used to collect and store data, and thoughts for future data collection possibilities among work based learning providers that are funded by the LSC.

3.2 Methodology

Similar to the pilot in the ACL sector, an exploratory approach was taken involving 33 in-depth telephone interviews with WBL providers of which 25 were regional providers and 8 national.

3.3 Findings

- **A significant proportion of 'core' data** is collected by most employers, principally in relation to:

  - Data of birth
  - Gender
  - Start date
  - Employment position
  - Ethnicity
  - Terms of employment

- In terms of the data fields, some providers found it **difficult to fit their staff under certain categories**. For example, under category of work, 'other' submissions were tutor/trainer, learning support and marketing roles; under contracted hours, self-employed staff do not have contracted hours, for other staff contracted hours are variable; and categories for qualifications were difficult to match to those held by some staff.

- This data tends to be **stored electronically** (as stated by two-thirds of providers interviewed during phase one), using Excel, Access or a payroll/personnel system. A smaller proportion (less than 25% of interview participants), of providers use paper-based storage methods. However, it must be noted that many providers tend to store data using a variety of methods, multiple electronic databases and storage of paper documents, which sometimes results in lengthy preparation activity in gathering data for submission.

- This **data is often held by various departments or personnel** and in some cases can be held locally and nationally. Workforce data is usually collated by the Training Managers / WBL Managers, Administrative co-ordinators, Human Recourses Managers or General Managers / Managing Directors / Chief Executives. As well as the people who collate the data, it is also accessible to Payroll, Project Managers and Line Managers.

- This information is **collected after recruitment and then updated** when additional training has been carried out or when additional qualifications are achieved. With some providers, the data is also reviewed and updated after appraisals to assess training needs; either every quarter, half year or annually. Sometimes however, there are gaps in the data due to incomplete entry at recruitment stage making data submission difficult and lengthy; this was true particularly of disability and qualifications data.

- **All WBL professionals are included in the data** unless they are externally employed. When a member of staff leaves their job the data is normally archived for between 3 and 9 years for tax and/or pension reasons. This is normally by either retaining the data on the current system or by copying their data onto hard file and storing it; before ultimately it is destroyed /shredded. Some companies, often with a smaller staff base, store information on ex-employees indefinitely. Others are unsure what is done with this data, often because the system has recently been updated.

- Many providers enquired as to whether the data submission was **mandatory** and gave the impression that they were unlikely to complete their submission if it was optional.

- A key concern was the **sharing of confidential information**. Many providers stated that they would need to seek permission of mangers or the individuals themselves before submitting any data.

4. LESSONS LEARNT AND WAYS FORWARD

4.1 Lessons Learnt

There are a few lessons that we have learnt from the pilots in terms of how workforce data is collected, stored and used in the ACL and WBL sectors. There are many points of similarities, which were identified during the pilots and are listed below:

- Some basic or 'core' data about the workforce is held by most organisations, which is collected during recruitment
- Data is not always captured about all individuals
- There is a great variety between the actual data fields between organisations in the same sector as well as between the two sectors, thereby resulting in issues of comparability. Therefore, pre-defined data fields are not always the same as data fields used by organisations
- Data is collected in a variety of electronic and paper-based ways and in a variety of databases, which can take time to amalgamate
- There is a general sense of concern in relation to data protection and sharing of information

4.2 Ways Forward

Based on the lessons that have been learnt from the pilots, LLUK intends to undertake the following actions:

- Provide clear guidelines on the proposed nature of data collection in terms of frequency of collection, scope and extent of data to be collected and the purpose of data collection via a communication plan; regular updates or even a 'steering group' of providers. Currently, many providers are unfamiliar with LLUK's new data collection system and a significant number are unsure about the requirement to submit data for each member of staff or how to use an online submission form.
- Develop a programme of support (in addition to survey instructions and easy-to-use guidance) to enable organisations interested in developing their workforce databases to participate fully in the 2008 data collection exercise.
- Develop a glossary of terms including abbreviations and acronyms of qualifications (and equivalence) would be useful for data teams contracted to collect and analyse data.
- Develop a process to deal with incomplete or non-accurate returns. In the initial years' of data return, data may be incomplete. To start with, there may be gaps in the data where:

  - The data has not been obtained at recruitment
  - The data has not been updated recently

- The data is held in different formats and in some cases is initially inaccessible

A phased approach to data collection or a partial submission of data could be considered to deal with this issue. As a starting point, the core data fields should be requested, with additional fields phased in over the coming years, as providers become more familiar with the process and allowing them the time to adapt and collate their data prior to submission points.

Moreover, providers could be given the choice of completing a template in full using lists of drop down answers or submitting a combination of essential background information on certain pages of the template and appending an extract from their own database. This will save the organisation time and should therefore increase participation, even though it will result in time-consuming cleaning and re-coding activities for LLUK.

- Ensure providers are given a considerable preparation period is needed to gather the data from a variety of sources since the data is held across departments and staff members. At least a six-month warning period should be built in to the data collection process so that providers can:

  - Organise a suitable member of staff to submit the data
  - Collate all required data from various storage facilities
  - Process some of the data to a suitable format
  - Put in place a strategy for collating missing data

- Ensure that providers are informed a year in advance of expected submission dates and the fields and categories required.
- Develop a data collection tool that is user friendly, robust and intuitive with

  - Clear instructions on how to complete the form for each member of staff
  - Distinctive 'submit data' buttons; one for final submission, one for submit and return at a later date and one for submit and continue for another member of staff
  - Functionality that enables providers to 'play-around' with their data – for example, view their own data; compare their data against regional data; save and print the data for their own records and return to the data a year later to update it rather than re-submitting from scratch

LLUK is currently building a data collection tool, which will be ready for deployment in September 2008. The findings and lessons learnt from the pilots are key in the development of this tool so that comprehensive workforce data from the whole FE Sector can be collected and analysed for the first time, thereby enabling the implementation of Priority 1 of the Workforce Strategy for the FE sector in England, 2007-2012.