

## **Proposed changes to the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) 2003/04**

### **Response from the Learning and Skills Development Agency**

#### **Introduction**

- 1 The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on changes that the Council intends to make to the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) for 2003/04, and the accompanying details of the proposed ILR fields for Adult and Community Learning (ACL) providers.
- 2 We have a particular interest in the establishment and maintenance of a comprehensive national dataset covering learners across the learning and skills sector. In recent years we have enjoyed 'analysis partner' status, providing us with direct access to the further education Individualised Student Record (ISR), with the kind permission of the LSC and the former Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The analytical opportunities thus presented now form an invaluable and essential element of our research and development activities in support of the sector, particularly in the areas of learner participation, retention and achievement.
- 3 Given this involvement, we support the Council's wish to harmonise data collection in ways that will optimise the capture of the full range of information concerning learners that assists the fulfilment of the Council's remit. Our comments in response to the consultation letter are made primarily from our perspective as a user of the national dataset for research and development purposes, aimed at helping to raise standards and quality across the sector. We have also endeavoured to reflect the legitimate concerns of learning providers, upon whom fall the main burdens of data gathering and recording.
- 4 We comment briefly below on the proposed changes detailed in the annexes to the consultation letter where we have points to add or suggestions to make.

#### **Annex B: Criteria for inclusion of data**

- 5 We support the key principles governing the Council's information requirements, set out in Annex B, as we indicated in our response to LSC Circular 02/03 *Collection Arrangements on Learner Data*. The development of effective strategies for planning, quality improvement and performance evaluation is dependent on timely, comprehensive and accurate data concerning learners. We endorse the Council's intention to fulfil its key requirements for data collection whilst simultaneously reducing the overall burden of data collection.

- 6 As before, though, we suggest an additional governing principle for the Council's proposals for data collection – that once the transition from the current arrangements is completed, the requirements concerning the same types of learner, engaged on programmes leading to the same level and type of qualification, should not differ between different types of learning provider. Otherwise, some types of provider are likely to feel understandable resentment that, compared to others, they have had imposed on them a disproportionate burden of costs. Any differences in the data collection requirements for different types of provider should stem primarily from differences in the characteristics of the learners they serve, and the programmes that learners are undertaking, and not from the nature of the provider.

## **Annex C: Proposed Changes**

- 7 We broadly endorse the proposed changes to the ILR detailed in annex C. We concur with the specific issues and concerns raised with regard to Information, Advice and Guidance recording and the tentative suggestion that the Additional Learning Needs field would be more appropriate for inclusion at a Learning Aim level.
- 8 We have only brief comments to add in relation to learner destination data.

### **L39 Destination**

- 9 We support the Council's pragmatic approach to limit the requirements placed on providers in this area whilst a feasibility study is undertaken. Longer term, though, we regard it as vital that better quality destination data becomes available. Knowledge of learner destinations after qualification makes an important contribution to our understanding of links between specific qualifications and progression to higher education or other further learning, and entry to the labour market or movement within it.
- 10 However, even if it was possible for providers to supply accurate data on first destinations, without an undue increase in workload there are significant limitations on the utility of information that covers only first destinations. For example, the average length of first full-time jobs after education is known to be quite short. Data of this type may therefore be quite misleading as to learners' longer term careers. Neither is there much empirical evidence to suggest any ideal level of correlation between qualifications gained and employment then taken up.
- 11 We suggest that instead of, or as well as, the collection of destination data by providers, the Council also commissions periodic 'reverse tracer' studies. These involve a stratified sample of employees being surveyed at different ages so as to gather data on the nature of their current post, their former and current experience of education and training, and their perceptions of the usefulness of this in relation to their current post.

## **Annex D: Proposed ILR fields for Adult and Community Learning (ACL) providers**

12 We believe that, on balance, the Council's proposals for data collection from the ACL sector are appropriate to its remit, and in line with the principles set out in Annex B. They also support our own research needs in the sector. However, as we have pointed out in the past in respect of the extension of the ILR to work-based learning providers, taken overall they represent a significant addition to the burden that will fall upon ACL providers not currently familiar with the Individualised Student Record (ISR). A recent report for the DfES on LEA Management Information for Adult Learning<sup>1</sup> indicates the scale of the challenge that many will face. Some are likely to require significant support, at least in the short-term, until their transition to the new arrangements is complete.

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### **Further information**

LSDA's responses are coordinated by the Policy and Communications Unit in collaboration with relevant expert staff.

For further information on the issues discussed in this response please contact:  
Peter Davies

Development Adviser  
Learning and Skills Development Agency  
Tel 01480 468 178  
[pdavies@LSDA.org.uk](mailto:pdavies@LSDA.org.uk)

For further information about the Policy and Communications Unit please contact:

Caroline Mager  
Manager, Policy and Communications Unit  
Learning and Skills Development Agency  
Tel 020 7297 9014  
[cmager@LSDA.org.uk](mailto:cmager@LSDA.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> Brass, J. *LEA Management Information for Adult Learning* (DfES Research Report RR342), York Consulting, January 2002