

Development of a National Technologically-based Management Information System

Research report

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Summary

This report offers a technical solution for the transfer of management information (MI) from information advice and guidance (IAG) partnerships to local Learning and Skills Councils and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) national office. This report recommends: technical solutions covering all types of current practice; a seven-phase implementation plan; recognition of work completed; ten case studies; and issues of change management and expectations. The key recommendation is to establish a centralised national MI database which can upload data in a standard format. The proposed solution recognises all areas of good practice and provides for the future as well as today's needs.

This report is of interest to LSC IAG contract managers and IAG partnership coordinators.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This report, which was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) national office, offers a technical solution for the transfer of management information (MI) from information, advice and guidance (IAG) partnerships to local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs) and on to the LSC national office. The solution in itself is relatively easy to achieve from an information and communication technology (ICT) perspective. Indeed, of the IAG partnerships which completed the survey, many had invested time, money and people resources into collecting information through an ICT solution. The conclusions and recommendations of this report cover: technical solutions to cover all types of current practice; a seven-phase implementation plan; recognition of the work already completed; ten case studies; and issues of change management and expectations. The real challenge for the implementation of the technical solution to work will be a change management project running in tandem with the technical solution phases. This will be required to facilitate understanding of requirements, dispel some of the negative attitudes about data collection and ensure that this becomes a routine function. In addition there is a requirement to agree on the information that is to be collected.

This would help to allay fears that there may be too many changes, overly high expectations, allied to no resources available within unfunded areas.

Taking all of the key research findings into account, it is clear that any recommended model for a national MI database would have to be simple, straightforward to implement, easy to use and, importantly, it would have to utilise elements of technology that are already in place (for example, the individual learning record (ILR) database) in order to maximise cost-effectiveness.

The key recommendation from this research is that the most appropriate solution to developing a national simplified client recording and tracking database for IAG MI is to establish a centralised national MI database which can have data uploaded in an agreed and standard format. This would facilitate, for any region that currently does not operate a management information system (MIS), a recommended MIS model, or alternatively a web-based client that inputs directly into the national database.

Throughout the survey of the IAG MIS, many good practice case studies have been identified and these LSCs and IAG partnerships should be commended. The solution proposed recognises all areas of good practice and provides for the future as well as today's needs.

Intended recipients:

LSC IAG contract managers and IAG partnership coordinators.

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Section 1: Introduction and Background

Introduction

- 1 This report is the conclusion of research which was undertaken by the National Training Partnership (NTP) Group on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), following successful submission of the research proposal in response to the national Quality Development Fund (QDF) prospectus. The research was undertaken between August and December 2002 to audit current practices for management information (MI) within information advice and guidance (IAG) partnerships and local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs). The report gives case studies of current practice, an information technology (IT) solution for the IAG service, and makes observations and recommendations for the cultural issues that are faced by all involved in the process.

Aim and Objectives

Aim

- 2 The aim of the project was to contribute to the development of a national, simplified client recording and tracking database for IAG MI by researching potential options.

Objectives

- 3 These were to:
 - > audit current systems used by the LSC for data collection;
 - > audit good practice in collection of MI (manual and IT systems) operating in IAG partnerships;
 - > research other IT-based MI systems that may be suitable for IAG MIS;
 - > evaluate the performance of IAG partnerships in returning MI for 2002/03;
 - > research cultural barriers to the collection of MI; and
 - > propose potential IT solutions for the national database, and comment on the implications for smaller organisations and others of adopting such a system.

Background

- 4 In January 1999, the Government announced that additional funding was available for the period from 1999 to 2002 in order to improve local IAG services for adults. IAG services were seen as the next stage in providing support to adults following the publication of *The Learning Age*, (DfES, 1998), and the establishment of the Ufi and **learnirect**. IAG services were to enable individuals, particularly those facing disadvantage in the labour market, to understand their learning options, participate in learning opportunities and improve their labour market prospects.
- 5 There were originally 76 IAG partnerships, but as a result of mergers and demergers there are now 67.
- 6 In *Evaluation of Adult Information Advice and Guidance Partnerships* (DfES, 2002) the key recommendation that emerged concerned monitoring and data collection requirements. The report said that there was a

paucity of information available at IAG partnership level, meaning that there is only limited evidence to demonstrate the role of information and advice services in helping clients to move into education, training or employment. (DfES, 2002 p. 6)

It went on to say that

different types of information and advice should be monitored in different ways. These may range from simply counting numbers of clients accessing information services from partner organisations, to more detailed information from clients using advice services (in terms of both the clients' characteristics and their actions following support). (DfES, 2002 p. 68)

The report also recommends a guide to monitoring and local evaluation, accompanied by templates for data collection.

National priorities

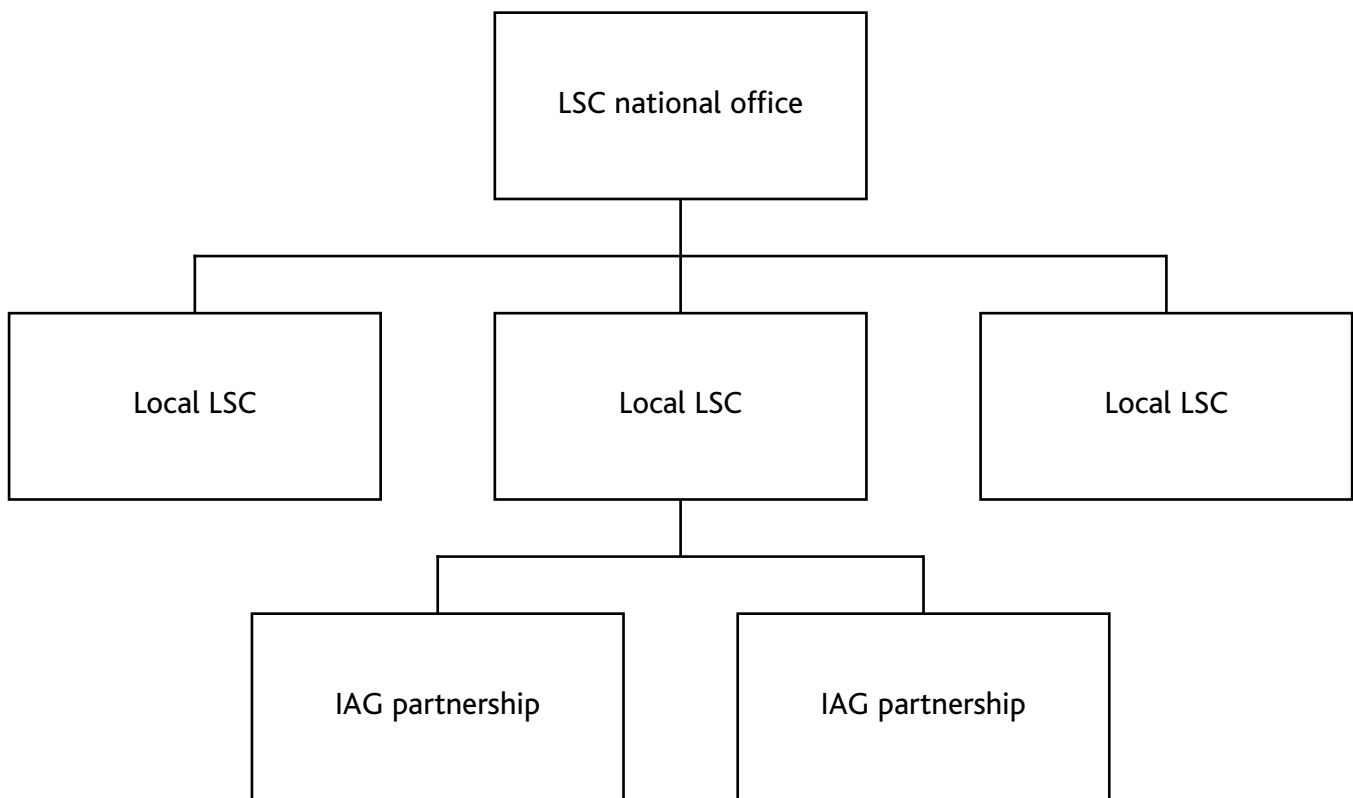
- 7 The key national priorities for IAG partnerships in 2002/03 were to:
- > ensure provision of a coordinated local network of IAG on opportunities in learning and work;
 - > ensure that all members of the community (with no upper age limit) have access to free information and advice services, with particular attention being given to the needs of disadvantaged clients;
 - > ensure that IAG services meet the relevant quality standards for learning and work; and

> work with the LSC to ensure coherence between local IAG services and other related services (basic skills provision, Connexions services for young people, higher education, Jobcentre Plus, **learnirect** and career development loans).

Information advice and guidance network

- 8 The IAG network consists of a number of providers, both funded and non-funded by IAG partnerships, that deliver IAG services.

Figure 1: IAG network structure.



- 9 Each funded provider is required to send details of client characteristics and interactions to the IAG partnership. Others may submit this data voluntarily. The IAG partnership sends summary details of client characteristics and interactions to the local LSC to an agreed timescale that is set out in guidelines produced by the LSC national office. The local LSC then authorises these figures, and sends them to the LSC national office, again to an agreed timescale that is set out in LSC national office guidelines. Statistics are sent to the LSC national office in a format described in its Operating Guide.
- 13 Desk research was undertaken to put current policy and operations into context. Case study material was developed and distributed: 17 respondents were willing to be included as case studies, and 10 case studies were completed in total. One-to-one visits were undertaken in order to develop the case studies and to ensure that a full appraisal of the practical issues was made. In addition, three steering group meetings were held.
- 14 Further analysis and desk research were completed before the final report and recommendations for a technical solution were compiled.

Research Method

- 10 A steering group was established to oversee the project, approve the questionnaires and ensure fair representation of the output.
- 11 The research comprised an Internet-based questionnaire, which was supported by e-mail, telephone survey and desk research. The surveys were provided to IAG partnerships and local LSCs. Questionnaires were completed by 36 IAG partnerships and 18 local LSCs. Visits were also made to IAG partnerships for one-to-one interviews with steering group representatives.
- 12 The survey concentrated on the following issues:
 - > what systems were being used, in terms of number and type;
 - > what support was available for these systems;
 - > what resources were available to ensure that systems were being updated;
 - > understanding and use of MI;
 - > areas of good practice in MI;
 - > areas of poor practice in MI;
 - > what training and skills were available to assist the development of MI; and
 - > how the MI is submitted, with an understanding of the Common Basic Data Set and the European Social Fund Short Event Record.

Section 2: Findings and Proposed Solutions

Key Findings

- 15 The majority of IAG partnerships do have systems for MI that have been developed mainly in-house. This investment shows a commitment to both the partnerships and IAG itself.
- 16 In each of the IAG partnerships that have a formal MI systems (MIS), there are individuals who are dedicated to collating and processing MI. Issues associated with such staffing need to be considered as part of a rollout of systems, especially for non-funded areas. Nearly 50% of the IAG partnerships polled are dependent on dedicated staff to complete MI returns.
- 17 Of the IAG partnerships polled, 50% feel that the LSC is unreasonable in their requests for MI. This may indicate a need for better communication and understanding of the purpose of MI.
- 18 Within local LSCs, 89% of respondents do not operate an IAG MIS application. This indicates that local LSCs could analyse IAG activity more effectively if an MIS application was in place, generating custom reports on specific areas as required.
- 19 Most local LSCs were happy that communication between themselves and the IAG partnerships were effective; 71% of the respondents said that the MI generated by IAG partnerships could be used in other areas of their work.
- 20 Effective training in the use of MIS has been highlighted by the research also. Where a current IAG MIS database is in use, 60% of respondents identified that more MIS training was needed. Most respondents were aware of the Single Event Record (SER), which is based on European Social Fund (ESF) returns. However, many were not aware of the Common Basic Data Set (CBDS) used by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).
- 21 A number of visits to evaluate current MIS were carried out and a summary of findings can be found at Annex B.

Cultural issues and barriers

- 22 Following the research, a number of cultural issues have been identified.
 - > Skills related to data manipulation appear to be more present at IAG provider level than within local LSC IAG teams.
 - > IAG partnerships and providers would like to receive greater statistical feedback at both regional and national level. This would facilitate better understanding of the information that is required by the LSC national office.
 - > Annual changes in information requirements mean that it is sometimes hard to be consistent in the supply of MI. Certain changes may have an impact on the additional time necessary to manipulate information (for example, changes in the design of forms).
 - > Clearer definitions of IAG terminology have been mentioned and the guide mentioned in the Summary Conclusions (paragraph 54 point (e)) would assist in this.
 - > Deadlines and timescales for submission of MI can be a problem in certain areas.
 - > Advance notice of any changes in MI would be ideal, in order to allow maximum time to adapt the existing MIS.
- 23 It is therefore vital that a plan for change is developed to run concurrently with the technical solution implementation. This plan would focus on the benefits of collecting data, shaping attitudes and ensuring better understanding of all parties' fears, requirements and barriers to success for these solutions.

Short Event Record

- 24 The SER, derived from ESF work, has been introduced in order to reduce the burden of collecting data for LSC co-financed programmes. Within the IAG framework, the SER has been seen by some IAG partnerships as a good template for core data. Local requirements mean that often the SER is not suited to all areas, although forms could be developed around a SER core data template.
- 25 Frequently, ESF coding related to special groups does not describe the client correctly. This issue has been raised as a concern throughout the project.

- 26 The view emerging from the research is that often, the SER form can collect superfluous information for IAG sessions.
- 27 Responses indicate that a framework could be used, detailing key fields that are required by the LSC national office; then at a local level, forms could be created around this template, allowing for the capture of individual area information.

Common Basic Data Set

- 28 The CBDS provides a standard for data used in school, education authority, DfES and other software systems. The evaluation of CBDS has shown that there is no direct impact on IAG, but, as with any national system, it should be able to accommodate data transfer through the CBDS format.
- 29 The CBDS is used mainly between education authorities and institutions, but adult CBDS may require some interaction with IAG data. The CBDS is under continued development with draft specifications, which are released at www.teachernet.gov.uk/Management/tools/ict/IMS/IMS_CBDS/.

Investment

- 30 To roll out a national MI data collection system, considerations would have to be made regarding any implementation costs.

Examples of good practice

- 31 There are a number of examples of current good practice related to MI within the scope of this project. These are recorded in the case studies in Annex A, and cover the following areas.

Forums

- 32 Many local forums are run throughout the IAG network, with IAG partnership representatives in attendance.

Distribution of information

- 33 Several IAG partnerships distribute regular newsletters, both in hard copy and electronic form (using e-mail). Summarised data can be made available to individuals through access to secure extranet and Internet sites, thus distributing IAG MI which has been developed in partnership with local web developers.
- 34 In another example, one IAG Partnership distributes quarterly brochures to regional providers, IAG partnerships and the local LSC, giving a breakdown of IAG activity using bar and pie charts.

Resource

- 35 Some IAG partnerships have appointed a dedicated data input resource for managing IAG data. Further examples of good practice in this area can be found within the 10 case studies listed in this report (Annex A).

Technical Solutions

- 36 Taking all of the key research findings into account, it is clear that any recommended model for a national MI database would have to be simple, straightforward to implement, easy to use and, importantly, would have to utilise elements of technology that are already in place (that is, the individualised learner record (ILR) database), in order to maximise cost-effectiveness.
- 37 Taking all the comments and findings into consideration, the key recommendation from this research is that the most appropriate solution to developing a national simplified client recording and tracking database for IAG MI is to establish a centralised national MI database, which can upload data in an agreed, standard format. This would facilitate, for any region that currently does not operate an MIS, a recommended MIS model (or alternatively, a web-based client that inputs directly into the national database).
- 38 In line with the above recommendation, detailed below are two potential models for an IAG MIS. Each model includes a brief description, diagrammatic representation, list of key benefits and a number of considerations. These are followed by recommendations for those IAG partnerships without an existing MIS and for those with an existing MIS.

Model 1

- 39 In model 1, each IAG partnership operates an MIS, generating data files that can be sent from the provider to IAG partnership either using e-mail or other appropriate media, and that are then forwarded to the local LSC for onward transmission to the LSC national office.
- 40 A data definition file would be based around a core data set, possibly using the SER data set as a template. Data from all local LSCs would be sent electronically to the LSC national office and imported into a central database.

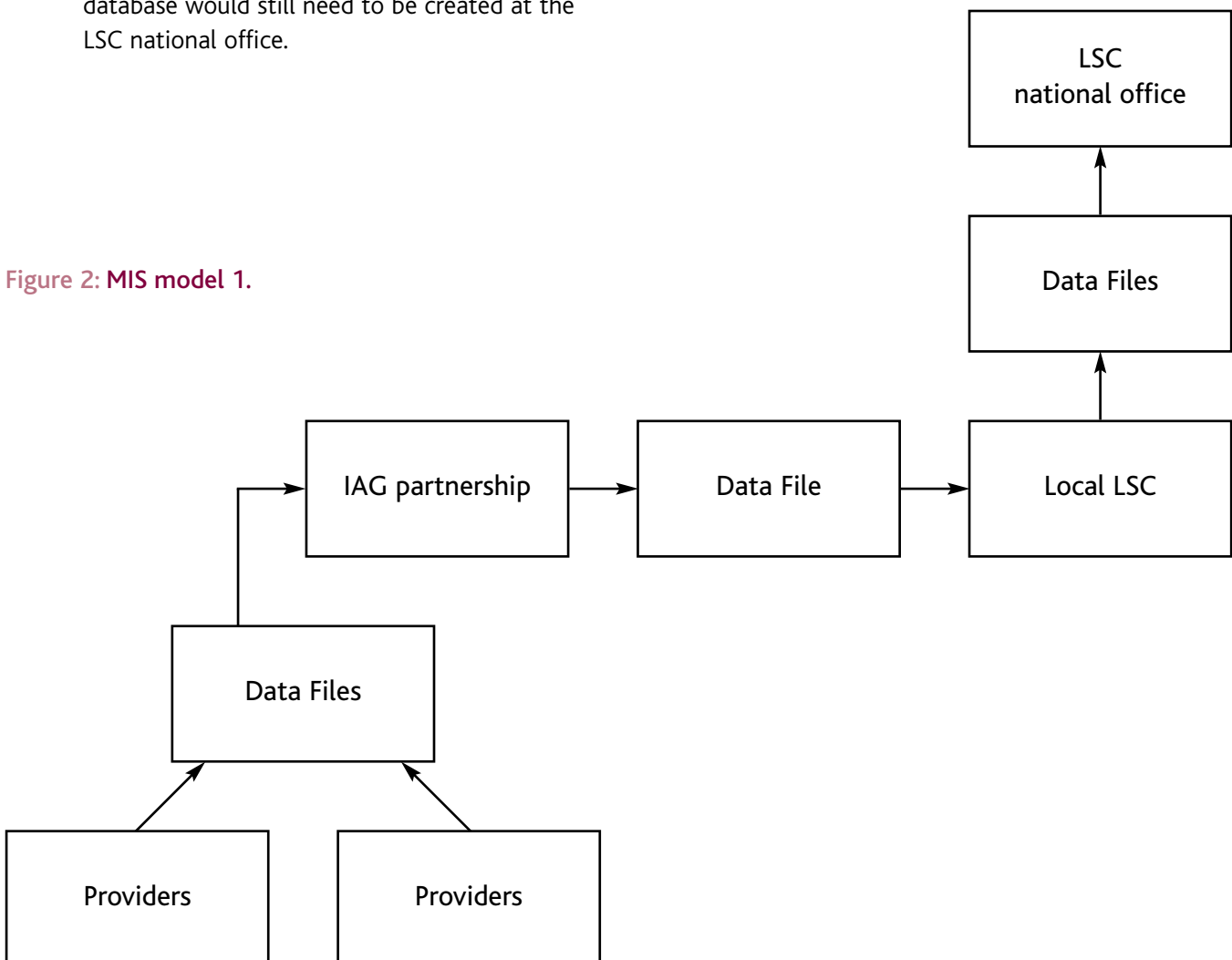
Benefits

- 41 The key benefits of model 1 are:
- > IAG partnerships with existing MIS applications would be able to adapt easily in order to submit data using this model; and
 - > no initial investment in a web-based database would be required, although a central MI database would still need to be created at the LSC national office.

Considerations

- 42 The considerations for model 1 are as follows.
- > A standard data format and integrity rules for the data files would be required in order to minimise errors on import.
 - > The local LSC would need to have in place either a module of the MIS used by the IAG partnership, or a system that is able to interpret the data being sent, if further data analysis is to be carried out by the local LSC.
 - > Administration time would be increased, owing to the need for individuals to import data at the LSC national office.
 - > Data files are subject to being misplaced or lost depending on the transport used, for example, e-mail or post, and so on.

Figure 2: MIS model 1.



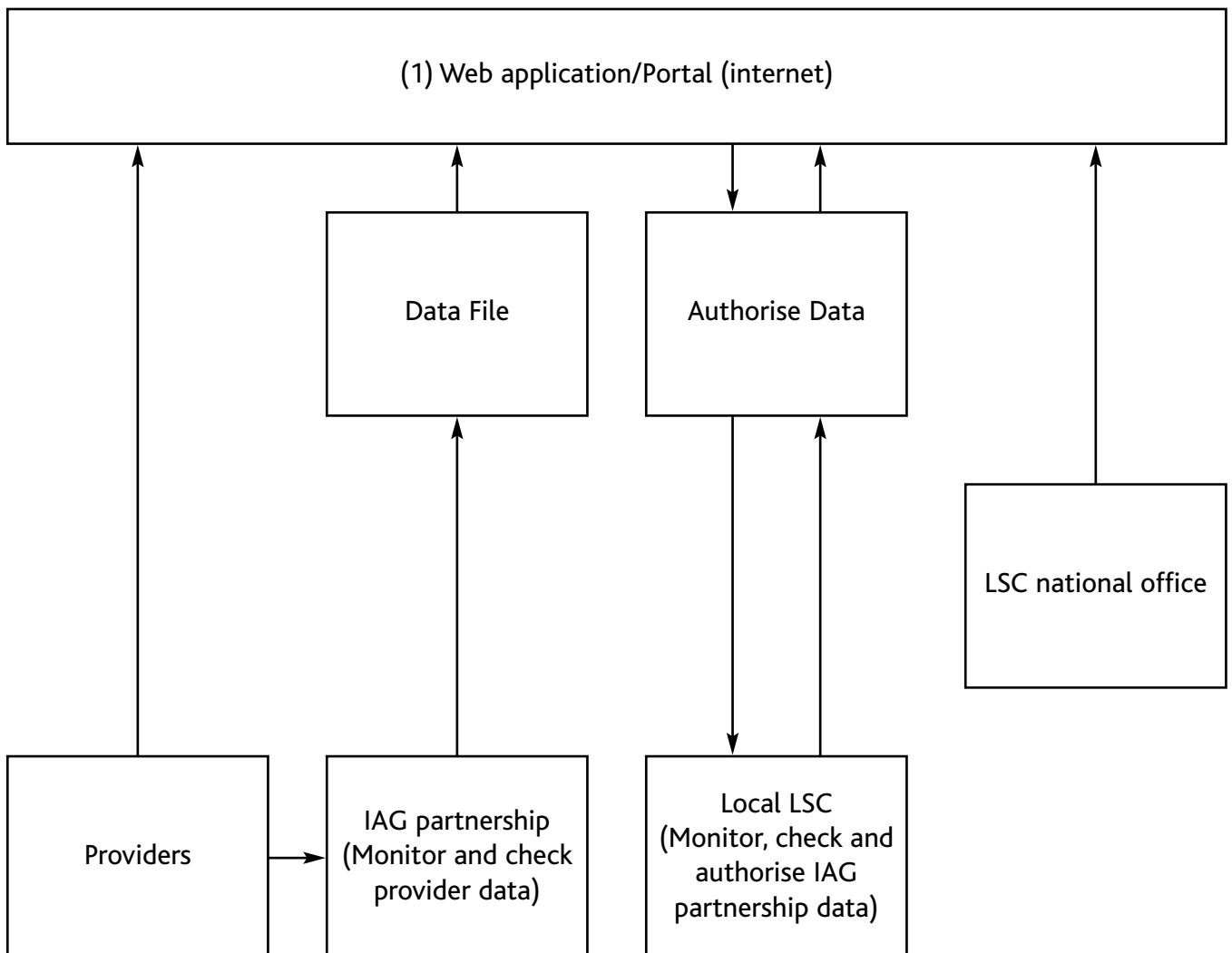
Model 2

- 43 Model 2 uses an Internet-based portal that allows secure uploading of data from the providers to IAG partnerships, from the IAG partnerships to local LSCs and from local LSCs to the LSC national office.
- 44 A data definition file would be based around a core data set, possibly using the SER as a template. The data file could be based either on a Microsoft Access Database (MADB) file format, or a text file that contains records within a fixed field-length format.
- 45 A choice of submitting data in either of these two data file formats would allow greater flexibility at the IAG partnership, while minimising the need for expensive development of the national MI database.

Technology

- 46 The technology used by the existing ILR database could be adapted to meet the needs of the IAG partnership MI system. The additional benefits of using the same technology are that for the future, IAG data could be transferred to the ILR if relevant.
- 47 A suggested enterprise solution would be a SQL Server 2000 database engine and application created using Microsoft ASP.NET technologies. The website and portal (1) would be on a web server (Microsoft IIS or equivalent). The web application would communicate with a database server (Microsoft SQL Server or equivalent) that is on a separate server for data security purposes.

Figure 3: MIS model 2.



- 48 An MADB template could be sent to IAG partnerships, in order to allow exporting of relevant data into a MADB file to be uploaded to the national MI database. SSL (secure sockets) can be used to encrypt data, in addition to secure username and password access, as files are uploaded to the national database.
- 49 A survey would be required of expected usage of the site, in order to ensure that the national MI database has sufficient bandwidth capacity to deal with the usage needed of it and expected levels of performance. A recommendation would be to test bandwidth and performance with selected pilot sites.

Benefits

- 50 The key benefits of model 2 are as follows.
- > Using a web-based database allows for ease of access as there is no need to update individual personal computers with software, as the application is centrally stored on the LSC national web server.
 - > If the website is set up as an information portal, certain statistics can be updated live and made available to IAG partnerships and their providers, in order to allow access to regional and national trends. This provides the feedback loop that has been identified by the research project.
 - > There is instant access to data and no double keying of data.
 - > A web solution is inexpensive when considering a national rollout, as there is no need to send out updates through CDs or e-mail. As soon as the website is updated, users are presented with that application when they next visit the website.
 - > An electronic messaging system could be built into the application for communication between the LSC national office, local LSCs and providers in order to promote good practice. Online forums could be created for discussion of good practice at all levels of IAG activity.

Considerations

- 51 The considerations for model 2 are as follows.
- > A comprehensive audit of IAG partnerships and providers would be required in order to ensure suitable Internet connectivity for submission and access to the national website.
 - > Technical support for IAG partnerships may be needed in developing export data files from existing systems, as well as training in web application for users.
 - > It is important that the benefits of a national database are promoted to all members of IAG partnerships and that any resulting system is user-friendly, in order to ensure ease of data capture.
 - > Any national database should not add a further workload to voluntary organisations, as this may lead to the non-collection of information by those organisations.

Information advice and guidance partnerships without management information systems

- 52 IAG partnerships that are currently without a MIS face the following considerations.
- > Providers are able to submit summarised data either to the website, or through individual interactions, through a series of web forms that meet the criteria of the national Operating Guide. These forms will be validated to ensure the integrity of data that are entered.
 - > When the IAG partnership processes quarterly returns, all data entered by providers are visible by the IAG partnership coordinator.
 - > At that point, the IAG partnership coordinator checks the MI and makes sure all is as expected, continuing to do this on an ongoing basis as more information is added. Once satisfied with the statistics, the IAG partnership coordinator can authorise the figures as a quarterly return, which is then automatically submitted through the national database for access by the local LSC. Then the local LSC is notified that the IAG partnership has submitted MI, and can check data and authorise quarterly statistics. Following this, the LSC national office is able to log into the web application and access local LSC-authorised figures.
 - > From feedback following the research, it seems that owing to the submission timescales, a solution that allows the LSC national office to view figures that have not been checked by the local LSC may be an option. A flag of 'Checked by local LSC' (or not) could be displayed in order to show whether the local LSC has validated the figures.

Information advice and guidance partnerships with management information systems

- 53 IAG partnerships that currently have MIS face the following considerations.
- > Providers and IAG partnerships can continue to operate using their own databases, but IAG partnerships are required to output data from their own systems to a data file that is defined by the LSC national office.
 - > IAG partnerships can upload the data file, then the local LSC is notified that data are available.
 - > The local LSC checks the data and authorises quarterly statistics.
 - > The local LSC then notifies the LSC national office of new submissions and the LSC national office can then access the data.

Section 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary Conclusions

- 54 In summary, the key conclusions which can be drawn from the research findings are as follows.
- a For partnerships that have invested in developing or purchasing an MIS, it is important that this investment is not wasted and that a national MI database is not imposed in place of any existing systems.
 - b Any national MI database should be simple to use and be supported effectively, so that organisations that are not funded to collect IAG information do not find any system an additional burden.
 - c The benefits of collecting data on a single national MI database should be publicised. Feedback on IAG activity both regionally and nationally could be generated dynamically from the database and published to a website that is available to the whole IAG network.
 - d Templates should be used systematically across IAG partnerships, so that evidence about throughput and impact is available across all the IAG partnerships. To ensure that new protocols are followed, additional support is required in the following forms:
 - > finance for monitoring and local evaluation activities; and
 - > establishment of workshops to explain monitoring and evaluation.
 - e A user guide should be produced and workshops implemented, but these should be seen as part of the 'plan for change' programme agreed with the IAG partnership, in order to ensure a successful implementation of the technical solution.
 - f Many IAG partnerships have invested in developing a set of regional IAG forms for the capture of information. These forms have been designed around national requirements, but with a local 'flavour'.
 - g The research revealed that the introduction of the SER, which was used to capture information, may cause difficulties within local LSC requirements. There is also a feeling that the SER is capturing too much information for the IAG function, because of the fact that the SER was designed around the capture of ESF data.

- h With the current rate of progress in IT, an important factor to consider is the ability of users to have access to the national MI database through all reasonable hardware, not only through the most recent PC specification or broadband Internet access.
- i An audit of hardware and communications infrastructure as laid out in an implementation phase (see paragraph 55) would lead to understanding of the current level of technology in use by IAG partnerships and local LSCs.
- j When defining a data file structure in order to send data to the LSC national office, it is recommended that a database file such as Microsoft Access is used, as research has found that often a fixed-length file format can cause difficulties when formatting data.

Recommended Implementation Plan

- 55 A key recommendation for the implementation of a national database for IAG MI is the use of a phased implementation approach. A suggested plan is outlined below.

Phase 1: Survey existing skills, Internet connectivity and hardware for use of national web-based database

- 56 This survey will show whether any IAG partnerships or providers would not be able to use the national database effectively due to their technical infrastructure.
- 57 This will in turn allow adequate time for investment to be made in communications hardware and training before the rollout of a national database.

Phase 2: Develop national management information database

- 58 Using the findings from phase 1, a national database can be developed using technology that can be applied by all IAG partnerships and local LSCs.
- 59 This stage would involve informing the users of any data template that would be required, in order to allow enough time for IAG partnerships with an existing MIS to adapt their systems to generate a data file in the correct format.

Phase 3: Pilot national management information database

- 60 Identify a selection IAG partnerships or providers and local LSCs from different areas (for example funded and non-funded, and so on) to pilot the national database.
- 61 Run a series of workshops for these identified pilot organisations.
- 62 Set up a development steering group to agree changes to the national MI database.

Phase 4: Gather feedback and evolve database

- 63 Gather feedback from pilot users in order to identify any potential problem areas.
- 64 Agree modifications to the national database through the steering group.

Phase 5: Workshops

- 65 Run a series of workshops to promote and demonstrate the new national database and the associated benefits of running such a system.

Phase 6: Rollout

- 66 Roll out national database, supplying user support manuals, technical support and guidance on using the system.

Phase 7: Maintenance and product enhancement

- 67 Ongoing maintenance and enhancement of the national MI database is recommended, ensuring that the database continues to meet the needs of all users and takes advantage of any advances in technology.
- 68 Enhancements could be agreed through a defined steering group.

Recommended Hardware Specification

- 69 The following section details the minimum specifications for hardware and communications technology that are required by users of the technical solution as proposed in model 2 (see paragraph 43).

Operating system and hardware

- 70 Detailed below are the minimum requirements for a PC using Internet Explorer version 5.5 (or above), as defined by Microsoft:
 - > operating system: Windows '98 Second Edition;
 - > Internet Explorer version 5.5 (or above);
 - > a 486 PC with a 66 MHz processor (Pentium processor recommended);
 - > for Windows '95 or Windows '98: 16 MB of RAM minimum;
 - > for Windows NT 4.0: 32MB of RAM minimum, and it must be running Service Pack 3 or a later version;
 - > for Windows 2000: 64MB of RAM minimum; and
 - > for Windows Me: 32MB of RAM minimum.

Communications technology

- 71 The application must be able to be run effectively on a standard 56k dial-up modem for single-user access. ISDN/ADSL broadband (or equivalent connection) would be a preferred solution for multiple users through a proxy server.

Additional software requirements

- 72 As electronic documents could be distributed in portable document format (PDF), it would be necessary to have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on the PC. This is free to download from www.adobe.com.

Annex A: Case Studies

Kent Guidance Consortium

Introduction

- 1 The Kent Guidance Consortium, which is the IAG partnership for Kent and Medway, has developed three major forms of data collection for IAG, Local Initiative Fund (LIF) and ESF-funded work. These are an individual client record (ICR), referral and tracking data and a partnership activity record.
 - a Individual client record – this contains all client details and details of advice and guidance sessions, referrals and tracking. Quarterly reporting of data for the IAG management group, local LSC and partner organisations provides a breakdown of information using charts and graphs, as well as geographical information system-derived maps, enabling comparisons of clients against age and gender profiles for Kent and Medway. The database is being offered to partner members of the Kent Guidance Consortium and a pilot is to be trialled in 2003.
 - b Referral and tracking data – a common referral system allows input of all referral data across the IAG partnership (over 200 organisations). Referrals to learning providers are tracked through agreed protocols which provide valuable impact data for IAG-funded activity, and evidence for ESF-funded and LIF-funded activity.
 - c Partnership activity record – with a large IAG partnership, the majority of members being voluntary and community sector organisations, it was important to identify activity that was generated through membership of the consortium. Community learning advisers and mentors complete partnership activity returns for input onto a database, enabling reports to be generated in order to provide a dynamic picture of partnership activity and to identify the work undertaken by individual organisations with IAG support. The results of a review of the perceived benefits that are delivered by IAG partnership organisations (analysed by various categories including location, size, duration of membership and range of priority groups) will allow the management group to allocate resources according to need.

Good practice

- 2 A number of lessons for good practice have emerged from these developments.

Individual client record

- 3 The ICR has provided data relating to the over-50s which supported assumptions that this priority group was not being sufficiently targeted. This has provided IAG-partnership-commissioned research recommendations on the guidance and learning needs of older people in Kent and Medway, with detailed benchmarking MI.
- 4 The ICR has also enabled the detailed statistical analysis of employed-status clients, including analyses by age, gender, location (using geographical information system (GIS) maps) and level of qualification. The additional information now being collected has allowed the IAG partnership to provide detailed data in order to inform the work of IAG workforce development advisers, partner organisations, the local LSC and Business Link.

Referral and tracking data

- 5 The referral and tracking system provides partner organisations with comprehensive data about their networks and a breakdown of client characteristics, thus enabling the IAG partnership as a whole to identify activity levels and areas where the referral system is not picking up activity, also ensuring intervention by community learning advisers, if appropriate. In addition, this system is proving to be of interest in supporting workplace advisers (including trade union learning representatives) and in providing evidence for accreditation in the **matrix** Standard for information, advice and guidance (the **matrix** Standard).

Self-assessment and quality

- 6 The IAG partnership has initiated a self-assessment and development planning process, which is based on the LSC's provider performance review processes. This will enable preliminary benchmarking in order to facilitate more accurate target-setting.
- 7 The IAG partnership fully understands the importance of effective communication and has introduced, in support of the technological MIS, regular newsletters, meeting forums and e-mail communication networks.
- 8 Comprehensive MIS training has been provided to all delivery partners, with ongoing support incorporated.

Conclusions

- 9 The IAG partnership has adopted the MIS to enable it to:
 - > analyse the deployment of resources and measure its effectiveness;
 - > ensure MI for the local LSC is more meaningful; and
 - > provide the IAG partnership with comprehensive statistics relating to activity, facilitating the implementation of a proactive approach to IAG development.

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Nottinghamshire Information Advice and Guidance Partnership

Introduction

- 10 Nottinghamshire IAG Partnership adopted, with modification, an existing MIS (an MS Access database) which was felt to be adequate for its requirements. Modifications were developed by a consultant who had experience in this area. The development of the system was funded through internal investment, enabling the IAG partnership to:
 - > identify gaps in reaching priority groups, allowing it to target more effectively those organisations reaching out to such groups;
 - > effectively track multiple interventions, in order to facilitate appropriate discussions with partners about why this has occurred; and
 - > manage the significant amount of MI being received from the 26 partner organisations and to input this centrally.
- 11 The IAG partnership plans to develop the system to ensure effective links with the finance department, so as to keep track of spending. It also wishes to have a system where partners can input their own MIS and which automatically produces reports in the same format as that required by the LSC national office. Finally, Nottinghamshire IAG Partnership requires an MIS which allows tracking of client feedback, assisting it to manage this area more effectively.
- 12 Statistical feedback to partners, steering group members and providers is currently done using hard copy newsletters or reports, particularly relating to the issue of client feedback, and by e-mail.

Issues

- 13 The following issues have been identified.
 - > An improved system is required to ensure that reports are raised in the required LSC format, particularly as the LSC now requires MI in electronic format.
 - > Although the current system is capable of providing the necessary MI, it does not provide the data automatically and it is felt to be cumbersome.
 - > The present system does not incorporate a means of validation, resulting in data entry errors such as incomplete or duplicate information being entered.
 - > Another weakness is the non-mandatory nature of the data fields.
 - > The system does not currently save on staff time as both the administrator and contract manager spend a significant amount of time checking the quality of the data and asking partners for additional information in order to close data gaps.

Conclusions

- 14 Although there are clearly issues with the existing MIS, the IAG partnership is convinced that the system has enabled enhanced data reporting and a faster turnaround of MI.

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Learning and Work Plus – Cheshire and Warrington Information Advice and Guidance Partnership

Introduction

- 15 The IAG partnership team for Cheshire and Warrington has been in post since the end of November 2001. Until March 2001, it was the Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral Partnership. Changes in the team and of the IAG contract manager took place between March and December 2001, and new systems have been developed since that time.

Good practice

- 16 A number of lessons for good practice emerged from the work at Cheshire and Warrington IAG Partnership.
- 17 Regular newsletters are produced (paper and electronic) to assist in network communication. These are distributed to full members (**matrix** Standard accredited or working towards) and associate (sign-posting organisations). The newsletters are also available on the Learning and Work Plus (LWP) website (www.learningandworkplus.org.uk).
- 18 E-mail discussion groups were set up in 2003. These cover specific groups, including full and associate network members, members within geographic boundaries and the management consortium. General lifelong learning information has been sent out about, for example, awards and funding, as well as specific reminders and requests. Explanation, reasons and reminders to submit MI are sent at least once every quarter to all quality-assured providers.

- 19 Network meetings for members are held in three geographical areas, and hosting by partners (full or associate membership) is encouraged. An opportunity is provided to exchange marketing materials about IAG- and related services (although, as yet this has not been as well used as initially hoped). Members of the IAG partnership are also invited to present at the meeting, in order to raise awareness of what their services comprise, with necessary focus on the IAG services provided. The most recent annual joint network meeting employed a consultant specialising in IAG issues, and stressed the importance of MI nationally and within organisations. The subject of the meeting was 'IAG – I Am Great – Focusing on the Quality of Your Services to Adults'. The sub-theme of this meeting was 'MI – Its Importance and Use.'
- 20 The LWP visit providers to assist with quality issues, raises awareness of IAG, and so forth.

Issues

- 21 The previous and current IAG partnerships had not developed standardised paperwork for recording MI. Each organisation submitting MI had developed its own paperwork and spreadsheets to record the MI that was required and date specific to their own organisation. Standardisation would contribute to consistency and shared understanding. The LSC's requirements for IAG MI are set out in tables 1, 2 and 3 of the Operating Guide (www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents – see the References for the full pathname). These were distributed directly to partners in 2003, with the promise of a standardised format and development of a web-based recording system.
- 22 The IAG contract manager at the lead body, Connexions Cheshire and Warrington, suggested the development of a web-based recording system. Connexions has a contract to deliver information and advice to adults under the name Careers Advice Plus. The MIS used for young people is called CORE (a system developed by Careervision). The adult recording system needed development, with a move towards 'webcore' – a web-based MI recording system – being welcomed. The local LSC was supportive of the development of such a web-based system and forwarded Quality Development Fund (QDF) information to LWP.

- 23 As development has been part of the QDF project, current funded providers have had hardware purchased from the original bid monies. As others begin to use the system, additional funding for hardware might have to be sought elsewhere and/or provided by the participating organisations. Organisations may have to bear the cost of Internet access.
- 24 An Excel spreadsheet was developed as part of the QDF project, prior to web-based, interactive MI recording. This was not used by most providers, being deemed complex and difficult to use. Providers wanted to use a paper-based equivalent which gave them an audit trail and was easy to use. The training on the paper-based and Excel versions which was supplied initially by the Connexions IT manager as part of QDF was welcomed, and understanding of the recording system improved.
- 25 It has since been arranged for the Excel workbooks to be printed up for use with clients – initially, for funded providers, but LWP wishes to roll it out to other IAG providers.
- 26 Amalgamated data for funded providers are broken down by funded organisation and (where available) by non-funded organisation. The collation time at the LWP team is lengthy.

Training

- 27 So far, a half-day workshop has taken place on the paper-based and Excel equivalent of a new web-based system of MI recording, with a demonstration of the new system at the joint network meeting on 13 December 2002 by the Connexions IT manager. Two half-day workshops were held in January 2003, which were run by Connexions IT for their own staff and others in the IAG partnership.

Conclusions

- 28 As yet there are no developments, but there is an intention to provide general data on the LWP website and newsletter. LWP would like to receive individual reports for each provider, as well as access to web-based recording through the LWP website in order to encourage practitioners to use the website more.
- 29 The benefits of using the new MIS are not yet proven. The potential benefits are as follows:
- > faster turnaround of MI;
 - > use of the system to record different funding stream requirements, for example, ESF, on the same recording system;
 - > ease of use;
 - > consistency throughout the geographical area; and
 - > can be used wherever Internet access is available.

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Northumberland Information Advice and Guidance Partnership

Introduction

- 30 Northumberland IAG Partnership has developed an MIS application to meet the information requirements required by the local LSC. A paper-based system was previously in place that was not able to report on the required information effectively within the timescales required.

Good practice

- 31 The good practice lessons that emerged were as follows.
- 32 The MIS was developed in-house over three months and using internal investment, owing to the tight timescales and lack of funds for external development. The MIS used the Excel platform to ensure familiarity and implementation within required deadlines.
- 33 Regular IAG newsletters are produced and forums are run, in addition to significant IAG marketing to local people.

Issues

- 34 The following issues have been identified.
- 35 A limitation of the current system is that a lot of information collected is additional to LSC requirements and therefore not collated or reported on. As a result, much – or indeed most – of the IAG partnership's work is not captured by the MIS and, therefore, is not recognised.
- 36 No issues were raised on implementation of the MIS as the system is simple – one-to-one training was given to delivery agencies by the IAG administrator.
- 37 Northumberland IAG Partnership provided comprehensive MI, but questioned the added value to itself of recording the LSC's IAG targets for IAG services that it does not fund. It was felt that the system was fine for providing the 'big picture', but when used further up the line, there is a danger of double counting.
- 38 Even in the figures provided, some large organisations (for example 20 adult education establishments and all the local FE colleges) were unable to contribute to any effective degree.

Conclusions

- 39 A simple returns system is in place that effectively balances the return of IAG delivery information against the (small) financial rewards that are available to individual delivery organisations, bringing improved accuracy of data and resource efficiency. Demographic and needs data can now be provided by the new MIS.
- 40 The IAG partnership reported that the introduction of an MIS has not improved communication, and that the perceived use of the data by the local LSC seems questionable. The MIS is seen as more of a benefit to the local LSC than the IAG partnership, which may indicate a need for improved communication of the aim and benefits of MI collection.
- 41 The implementation of the MIS has had the most impact in subcontracting by clarifying delivery requirements, returns and funding. Northumberland IAG Partnership is looking to move eventually to a web-based system, but major investment is required.

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Tyne and Wear Information Advice and Guidance Network

Introduction

42 The main driver to introduce an effective MIS for the Tyne and Wear IAG Network was the need to collect accurate data for LSC purposes, although this was already being done in a less formal way for the benefit of community learning advisers. The original system was a mixture of paper-based and individual Access and Excel spreadsheets which were used for personal record-keeping, and not used coherently to produce comprehensive MI reports.

Good practice

- 43 The following lessons for good practice emerged.
- 44 The new MIS was established by the IAG partnership's information officer and uses an Access database. Concerns over practical aspects of the new system were allayed by knowing that the system designer was on hand to help overcome any problems.
- 45 A particular benefit of the system is the ability to identify how drop-in services are being used – numbers, age groups, types of request – and using the information to plan an improved service.
- 46 An extensive communication network produces and distributes approximately 450 newsletters to provider organisations every two months. These feature national and local information about IAG services.
- 47 Other communication channels include local area forums, quarterly IAG partnership meetings (including coordinator reports on delivery and quality and guest presentations by other relevant organisations) and larger events to share information about services. Typically, these have included input from FE, HE, the Employment Service (now Jobcentre Plus), local community projects, Worktrain, Connexions and the BBC.

Issues

- 48 The following issues were identified.
- 49 Although communication of IAG statistics to the local LSC is good, these are also time-consuming to collect and collate. This is a result of the decision to introduce the MIS described above, and in the expectation that a national system would be introduced in the near future.
- 50 Although it provides more detailed information, the new MIS is also labour intensive. However, it does allow staff to evaluate what they are doing in a more effective manner.

Conclusions

- 51 No further developments are planned until a decision regarding the introduction of a national system is made.

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Lincolnshire and Rutland Information Advice and Partnership

Introduction

52 The IAG partnership's MIS is based on the Access system developed by the North West London IAG Partnership but has been customised to requirements of the Lincolnshire and Rutland IAG Partnership. The IAG partnership's in-house IT team has since carried out a number of modifications to the system, which has been thoroughly tested and only implemented recently. System development was funded by the IAG partnership. The desire is to put the MIS on the IAGA website (www.iaga.co.uk) but the IAG partnership does not currently have the technical know-how to do this. The MIS is currently available on a stand-alone basis with providers, apart from Connexions, where it is a shared area. Currently, there are no licensing costs as the IAG partnership owns the system.

Good practice

- 53 Good practice lessons were noted in the areas below.
- 54 The MIS has benefited the IAG partnership by providing enhanced reporting, for example, the ability to search against specific criteria such as number of males, unemployed, people over the age of 45 and so on.
- 55 It is also hoped that, in time, and once teething problems have been ironed out (for example, persuading some partners to use it), the system will save staff time and effort. For the time being, however – and until the MIS is used correctly and consistently – it could prove to be even more time-consuming.
- 56 Communication before the introduction of the MIS was perceived to be good, even though it was using a largely paper-driven, manual process. Since its introduction, communications are still considered to be good, but it is too early to identify how much difference the new system is making.
- 57 The IAG partnership makes full use of quarterly newsletters, meetings, mail shots and, of course, e-mail, which is essential in a rural area.

Issues

- 58 A number of issues have been identified.
- 59 Changes in MI recording requirements from the LSC have resulted in several modifications to the system, and no doubt this will have to happen again in view of the impact of co-financing.
- 60 There have also been problems in rolling out the MIS to partners. In spite of comprehensive instructions and training (one-to-one sessions, but possibly group sessions in the future), not all partners complete the record correctly – which makes interrogation difficult.
- 61 There is a reluctance on the part of small partners to use the MIS. They feel that to use it will take more time than they currently have to devote to IAG.

Conclusions

- 62 Overall, the IAG partnership does not feel that the MIS has improved the accuracy of data, although it has had an impact in other areas, such as the allocation of client reference numbers, which is useful for recording each intervention and for practitioners to be able to see historical data at a glance. This will improve client tracking. In the long term, the IAG partnership feels that the MIS will add significant value.

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Staffordshire Information Advice and Guidance Partnership

Introduction

- 63 Although the IAG partnership's original paper-based and spreadsheet-based MIS provided a good level of communication, the constant change in MI requirements – including the impact of co-financing and the lack of compatibility in ESF and LSC data requirements – has now rendered the system inadequate. Hence the rationale to redesign the system, which has been funded through internal investment.
- 64 The Staffordshire IAG Partnership introduced its MIS at a very early stage, when no relevant off-the-shelf packages were available, hence the decision to develop it in-house, working to a very short timescale imposed by the local LSC. Information is stored on an SQL Server database and data input using a web-based front-end which matches the layout of the IAG partnership's paper-based data capture form. Information is currently input centrally, the web-based front-end allowing the option of external provider access if necessary in the future. Training on the new system has been through one-to-one sessions.
- 65 MIS communication is underpinned by regular newsletters, forums, e-mail communication and meetings.

Good practice

- 66 Lessons for good practice included the following.
- 67 The use of a single-side A4 form to capture client data has proved to be the most convenient and acceptable format from both a staff and provider perspective.
- 68 Staff and providers submit client forms to a central location. Centralised data input allows time for the IAG partnership to better use trained and experienced advisers in the delivery of services, as opposed to time spent on data input.

Issues

- 69 The following issues have been identified.
- 70 The re-design of the MIS has been affected by changes to both the LSC's IAG MI requirements and SER requirements. The redesigned SER does not capture the additional requirements of the local LSC and therefore requires the use of a second form, or adaptation of the new SER.
- 71 When the MIS was implemented, the main issue related to the initial process of capturing client data through the use of paper-based client records and the volume of data involved. Providers and staff did not feel comfortable in gathering such a broad range of detailed personal information.

Conclusions

- 72 The MIS has enabled the IAG partnership to produce more accurate and effective reports for the LSC and the strategic group, and has resulted in a saving of staff time and effort in processing MI. The system is currently being redesigned to take into account the number of changes that have been implemented by the LSC, and to provide more flexibility in the analysis of data at a more detailed level using data cube software. The front-end is to be re-designed to take into account the new SER structure.

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West Sussex Information Advice and Guidance Partnership

Introduction

- 73 West Sussex IAG Partnership has recently implemented a technologically-based MIS to replace paper-based methods. The main reason for moving to an MIS was to provide objective data on progress in reaching priority groups and other similar data.
- 74 Development of the MIS was driven by the IAG coordinator and funded using core IAG funding. The introduction of the MIS has improved the ability to collect and process MI, but not necessarily to improve the communication of statistics. Key benefits of the new MIS are that it is easy to use and simple, having been designed to meet the needs of the IAG partnership.

Issues

- 75 One of the key considerations for development of the MIS was the need to support existing hardware and not to invest in new hardware, as the money is needed for IAG delivery.

Conclusions

- 76 The MIS has allowed the IAG partnership to relay a variety of information back to the provider on a quarterly basis, including client profiles and the services used. This assists in resource planning and increases partnership efficiency. The MIS has had most impact on the targeting of certain priority groups.

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Lancashire Information Advice and Guidance Partnership – The now! Network

Introduction

- 77 The now! Network underwent a merger at the beginning of April 2002 with its sister network Go for It in Lancashire. With over 42 partners and 116 delivery centres, an effective method of data collection was necessary. To ensure local responsiveness to identified priority groups, it was essential that in-depth reports could be produced in order to inform discussion at local sub-network meetings and to have an impact on service delivery.
- 78 The main drivers in deciding on a MIS application were the IAG network manager and the central IAG team. Additional development funding was secured through a bid for EQUAL funding (a strand of ESF structural support funds managed by the Department of Work and Pensions in the UK).
- 79 Communication of IAG statistics prior to the implementation of the MIS 'IAG Manager', developed by Reidmark, was good. However, the production process was time-consuming and not as effective as it could have been, as considerable time had to be spent analysing data in order to produce the information required.
- 80 The main systems in place before the introduction of IAG Manager were a combination of paper-based and spreadsheet records.
- 81 The implementation of an MIS showed immediate benefits to the IAG partnership, which are summarised below.
- > MI was collated, assessed and presented using a single set of data;
 - > system functionally ensures immediate web access;
 - > partnership information remains consistent in the way in which it is gathered, updated and presented;
 - > partnership team members are fully informed of the vision, services and priorities and their contribution in achieving them; and
 - > employee performance is maximised through convenient access to critical information, services and applications.

- 82 The IAG partnership in Lancashire has been able to secure improved service and programme delivery, management of resources, stakeholder communications and organisational processes.

Technology

- 83 Accurate, up-to-date information is critical to achieving the business priorities of an IAG network. IAG Manager achieves this by harnessing information within six dedicated modules that are focused on the key organisational activities of running a network:
- > e-mail – sending and receiving messages through one’s partnership e-mail account;
 - > diary – planning one’s own and the team’s appointments and events;
 - > business – combining people development, purchasing systems, organisational processes and business planning;
 - > finance – managing funding streams, budgets, spending plans and procurement;
 - > contact – integrating customer, supplier, partner and member details; and
 - > ‘my whiteboard’ – disseminating business information and empowering employees to manage and contribute to the business.
- 84 This Internet-based system allows the IAG partnership to collect MI from all partners and produce a series of reports on a real-time system. MI can be reported on by partner, geographic area, sector, funding stream or globally. This has improved the effectiveness of the IAG partnership, as shortfalls in delivery can be reported to individual partners on a monthly basis. The system also automatically generates quarterly reports in the LSC-required format.
- 85 Data can be input in a variety of ways, including statistically, as they are received from partners or through a client information module which automatically extracts the relevant information necessary for reporting arrangements.

Good practice

- 86 There are a number of lessons for good practice in place.
- 87 Regular newsletters are circulated to key stakeholders locally, including members of the IAG partnership, LSC colleagues and contacts within strategic forums such as learning partnerships, local strategic partnerships, and so on. The purpose of the newsletter is to promote local delivery of IAG, increase awareness of partner organisations and inform future development of services.
- 88 Six local sub-networks have been created which act as IAG forums. Chaired by members of the operational management group, these sub-networks inform local marketing strategies, consider local labour market conditions and agree local priorities for staff development and quality assurance support.
- 89 A discussion forum is facilitated through e-mail. The purpose of this is to ensure that members of the now! Network are aware of key issues affecting the operational management and delivery of IAG services, and to discuss local implications. The forum also encourages the exchange of good practice, as frontline staff can post questions regarding service delivery and receive responses from delivery staff within different organisations.
- 90 In consultation with delivery partners, an MI form was created for completion. This captured all the information necessary to meet LSC requirements. An optional advice and referral form was also produced for partners to use if existing documentation could not meet MI requirements.
- 91 Delivery partners submitted their MI forms monthly. These were entered manually into an Excel spreadsheet, which could then be interrogated to produce the information necessary to complete the LSC tables. The introduction of IAG Manager has decreased the need for centralised data collection enabling more effective use of staff resource.

Issues

- 92 MI can be reported globally, locally, by partner and by funding stream. Because of the functionality of the system, a dedicated LSC portal has been created which enables the contract manager to access statistics on a needs basis – weekly, monthly, quarterly, and so on. In addition, extra and occasional reports can be produced, for example, on the percentage of clients seen with a qualification below Level 2. The availability of information on demand has ensured that the impact of adult IAG is factored into local strategic development.
- 93 The now! Network has always been committed to ensuring effective communication throughout the IAG partnership and has invested considerably in developing Internet-based communication systems since 1999. The now! Network already had a members' extranet and the continuing use of Internet-based technology in the application of an MIS formed part of now! Network's internal communication strategy.

Training

- 94 MIS Training is delivered via one-to-one and self-study sessions. A user guide was produced and complemented by one-to-one training. The system is very user-friendly and even the most technophobic member of staff can use it easily after one or two sessions.

Conclusions

- 95 Discussions are already taking place with the local LSC to consider how IAG delivery can be benchmarked against local targets for adult participation in learning: for example, 40% of adults accessing a qualification at Level 2, the percentage of adults identified with a basic skills need, and so on. Statistics are fed back to providers using e-mail, newsletters, websites and meetings.

- 96 Dissemination of MI is crucial to ensure that partners are aware of the impact of IAG funding. Monthly reports are produced for each provider in order to inform them of achievement against their targets. Local reports are produced for discussion at local area network meetings and global reports are produced for circulation to stakeholders. MI is presented on the now! Network corporate website and reported on within the newsletter.
- 97 The implementation of a real-time MIS has improved accuracy, efficiency and has streamlined the working practices of the IAG partnership.
- 98 Recognition of the need for, and provision of, training and support for users of the MIS is also an important point.
- 99 Advanced reporting facilities have allowed for improvements in specific areas: in particular, referrals are more easily reported, delivery in rural and deprived wards is reported on automatically, trends in service delivery – for example, impact on priority groups – are clearly identified and reported.
- 100 A close working partnership with an IT company has resulted in a MIS application that meets the exact needs of the IAG partnership. Communication of statistics is now considered to be excellent.

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Gloucestershire Information Advice and Guidance Partnership

Introduction

101 The development of a web-based MIS was funded internally through the core IAG budget. The decision to acquire an MIS was taken in conjunction with local LSC staff and the IAG partnership manager. The system cost approximately £4,000 (plus staff time) to commission and implement, and was introduced in the following phases:

- > an invitation to tender was issued to web hosts in March 2002;
- > the system was operational by May 2002; and
- > staff were trained in use of the system in May 2002.

102 The main reasons for moving to an MIS were local LSC contractual requirements. However, the process has proved valuable and is now crucial to planning the delivery of services accurately.

Good practice

103 A number of areas of good practice have emerged:

- > effective targeting of delivery resources;
- > monitoring of targets to ensure effective performance; and
- > sharing of labour market information data.

104 The Gloucestershire IAG Partnership, known as the GO Partnership, has developed an electronic MIS which is based on the local LSC client statistics that are required to be collected. This has worked well, as it can be accessed from any telephone line with Internet access. This has proved to be very useful for outreach adviser staff who work in remote locations.

105 For the project manager and local LSC staff, the system has proved to be useful in gaining a picture of client access of services at any given time, and for monitoring purposes in terms of targets being met, as well as client profiles.

106 In addition, the system has a search mechanism that allows authorised staff to draw down statistics across any category, for example, by ethnicity, disability, priority group, and so on.

107 The implementation of the system has enabled much more efficient monitoring of the outreach services that are delivered through the IAG partnership team, and has enabled both the IAG team and the local LSC to identify accurately where the greatest uptake of services has been in terms of geographic location and client groups.

108 MI data is shared with partners through:

- > steering group meetings;
- > local LSC review meetings;
- > IAG sub-group meetings; and
- > the newsletter.

109 On implementation of the MIS, there were no real concerns expressed, as the system is only in use for IAG partnership outreach delivery (comprising three members of staff).

Issues

110 Prior to the implementation of the MIS, a paper-based system was used, with MI data sheets attached to client records. It was difficult to determine accurately all the client categories and numbers to be included in the statistics. This was often because of human error when completing forms.

111 The system was not user-friendly, and from a management perspective it was very cumbersome and required continual cross-referencing, which in turn took up valuable time.

112 The new MI data collection system does not allow for error as the system will prompt the user if required boxes are not completed.

113 The GO Partnership now has an effective MIS that is always up-to-date and accurate. It allows the GO Partnership to draw down all statistics at once or to select specific client data statistics. This is proving to be much more useful to the planning of services and monitoring against targets. The local LSC has been supplied with a password to access statistics, which has proved beneficial, as it can now access data without having to wait for the IAG partnership to produce them.

Benefits

- 114 The benefits of the new MIS are as follows:
- > reports are now available at the touch of a button and are always up-to-date and accurate;
 - > all client data or specific sections are available through search mechanisms;
 - > it facilitates enhanced sharing of labour market information with partners;
 - > increased reporting functionality as a result of the MIS implementation has allowed for greater improvements in analysis of access and referral to guidance services in Gloucestershire; and
 - > the system has provided a flexible tool that now allows a range of client data to be shared without breaching client confidentiality.

Technology

- 115 A decision was made to use existing website and Internet technology. This can be accessed through partner agencies' sites, laptop computers, and so on, so long as Internet access is available.

Training

- 116 Training in the system was delivered through one-to-one sessions with each member of the outreach team. The training sessions were not complex and took approximately 30 minutes.

Conclusions

- 117 It is planned that statistics will be fed back to providers through the steering group and local LSC reviews. Statistics also featured in the newsletter and will appear on the website in the new business plan. This is assuming that LSC national office is not planning to introduce a uniform MIS system for all IAG partnership to adopt, in which case a new system would have to be considered.
- 118 The MIS has not had any significant effect on saving time – it is still necessary for staff to collect manually client data onto forms which are then entered into the MIS. As such, it has increased staff workload, but has brought added benefits that justify this additional time.
- 119 The MIS has had the most impact on the planning of services for both the partnership outreach team and some key agencies. Details of referrals to other agencies could be more specific, as the current system only collects data in relation to referral to sectors, not specific agencies. However, even this data is proving to be useful in drawing key partner agencies into closer working relations. It is envisaged that the system will also influence future amendments to IAG partnership referral policies.

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References

DfES (1998) The Learning Age.

DfES (2002) Evaluation of Adult Information Advice and Guidance Partnerships (DfES Research Brief 359).

Website Resources:

www.adobe.com

www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/Subjectlisting/FundingLearning/InformationAdviceandGuidance/default.html (the LSC Operating Guide)

www.iaga.co.uk

www.learningandworkplus.org.uk

www.teachernet.gov.uk/Management/tools/ict/IMS/IMS_CBDS/

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