LEA Management Information for Adult Learning

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Department for Education and Skills

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Contents

1   INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1.1   This report presents the findings from an extensive consultation exercise to establish the readiness of LEAs to provide the new Individual Learner Record (ILR) management information (MI) due to be introduced by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in September 2003.

Background

1.2   In April 2001, the funding of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) passed from LEAs to the Learning and Skills Council. The LSC has indicated that from 2003, ACL will be predominantly formula-funded. This will require LEAs to collate and manage a more extensive array of management information than at present. The new arrangements are not expected to come into play until September 2003, providing LEAs with a two-year transition period to come up to speed and introduce new arrangements.

1.3   The most fundamental ingredient in this switch is the move from the provision of purely summary data, to individualised learner data. At present the DfES requirement for management information on ACL is covered by the AE1 and AE2 forms, which request relatively simple summary information. The new Individual Learner Record the LSC is seeking to introduce will require detailed information on each learner, more closely reflecting the current Individualised Student Record (ISR), which is collected by the LSC from Further Education Colleges and External Institutions.

1.4   The current position in terms of LEA handling of ACL management information is variable in coverage, quality, consistency and potential for addition and integration. All LEAs have experience of providing AE1 and AE2 information, but the systems used for collecting and storing this information vary enormously. A number of LEAs, who directly deliver ACL or act as External Institutions, also have experience of the provision of ISR information, but again the quality and flexibility of these systems is variable.

1.5 This variation in abilities and experience across the country presents a considerable challenge to the development of the Individual Learner Record systems. There needs to be a realistic assessment of what can be achieved in the time available and the best approach to developing LEAs' management information systems capacity.

Aims of the Study

1.6 The primary aim of this research is to assess the readiness of LEAs to improve and systemise the quality of their returns on adult education for the ILR, and generally to improve their management information for a variety of purposes.

1.7 The study will seek to achieve this aim through:

- making an assessment of the range of LEA readiness to meet requirements of the ILR against a generic classification of capacity:

   − ability to produce an ILR dataset right away;

   − could produce ILR in EI capacity alone;

   − have a fully functioning database system, but not in ILR format;

   − have a partial IT system;

   − have no IT-based management system;

   − can guarantee data through other providers.

- providing an assessment of hardware, software, connectivity, skills, organisational culture and ownership issues;

- providing an assessment of how group-based issues might be resolved;

- formulating recommendations in relation to the following:

   − Consider the minimum level of detail needed to keep burdens to a minimum. This analysis should draw on LEAs and other current and intended users of the data;

    –   consider the effect of any proposed data collection systems on the voluntary and community sectors, where existing systems are likely to be rudimentary;

    –   consider where surveys might be a more appropriate means of gathering any further information required;

    –   assess how entry qualifications for adults currently not robust in the ILR might be improved;

    –   assess the extent to which LSC/DfES might be more proactive in possibly developing or at least recommending a common database product.

Methodology

1.8   This report on the readiness and implications of the change to ILR based MI systems is based upon:

- **background research** into existing ISR systems and with the LSC on there expectations for the ILR. This work fed into the **design of materials** for the postal survey and case study phases of the project;

- **a postal survey** of all LEAs examining their current MI systems, their current IT capabilities and their attitudes towards key issues relating to the change to ILR based management information systems. Over 80% of LEAs have responded to the survey;

- **in depth case studies** with 10 LEAs to explore these issues in more depth and to provide greater insight in to the e-cultures of LEAs. A full list of case study LEAs is included in **Annex A**;

- in addition to the methodology outlined in the original tender we have met with a number of **current and potential vendors of ISR/ILR software** to explore their experiences of working with LEAs and to discuss barriers to the development of systems. These organisations are also listed in Annex A.

Report Structure

1.9　The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- in **Section 2** we outline the current readiness of LEAs to provide ILR information;

- in **Section 3** we start to examine LEAs' ability to adapt to the new MI standards and to look at some of the practical issues facing them and the LSC;

- **Section 4** discusses the attitudes of LEAs towards the LSC's prescribed solution for collecting the ILR data, a web portal;

- in **Section 5** we begin to pull together this information to provide a basic system requirement for ILR set up;

- finally in **Section 6** we outline our conclusions from the study and set out our recommendations for the continuing development of the ILR process.

2   CURRENT READINESS OF LEAS

Introduction

2.1   In this section we examine the current readiness of LEAs to provide ILR information. This section is structured as follows:

- LEA profile;
- E-cultures;
- existing systems;
- non-schedule 2 learners;
- costs of current MI systems;
- LEAs' assessment of readiness;
- overall assessment of readiness.

LEA Profile

2.2   LEAs vary considerably in both the size of their ACL provision and the model of delivery. This profile does have a strong bearing on the ability of individual LEAs to provide an ILR, with particular focus falling on the models of delivery.

2.3   Below we set out a basic profile of the LEAs from whom postal responses have been received. **Table 2.1** examines the delivery models used by LEAs for ACL. This has been divided into three broad categories:

- **Contracting Out** – these are LEAs that contract out all ACL to other providers. These LEAs are currently only obliged to provide summary MI on ACL and hence have perhaps the furthest distance to travel;

- **Direct Deliverers** – these LEAs provide all ACL directly and often provide an ISR return to the LSC through roles as External Institutions. These LEAs, therefore, already have considerable experience of the provision of individualised MI for all their ACL;

- **Mixed Delivery** – these are LEAs that both contract out and directly deliver ACL. This implies a mix of experience. These LEAs will have experience of providing ISR information through their Direct Delivery function, but are currently under no obligation to collect individualised information for contracted out provision.

Table 2.1: Delivery Model Profile		
	No.	**%**
Contracting Out	49	40.5
Direct Delivery	38	31.4
Mixed Delivery	34	28.1
	121	

2.4 One hundred and fifty surveys were sent out and 81% of the LEAs responded to the survey. The largest proportion of responses have been received from Contracting Out LEAs (41%), while similar numbers have been received from Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery LEAs.

2.5 In **Table 2.2** the case study LEAs have been extracted and classified according to their delivery models. The mix of delivery models broadly reflects the overall structure of LEAs indicated by the survey returns.

Table 2.2: Case Study Delivery Models	
Case Study	**Delivery Model**
DD1	Direct Delivery
CO1	Contracting Out
MD1	Mixed Delivery (External Institution)
DD2	Direct Delivery (External Institution)
MD2	Mixed Delivery (External Institution)
MD3	Mixed Delivery (External Institution)
DD3	Direct Delivery (External Institution)
CO2	Contracting Out
CO3	Contracting Out
DD4	Direct Delivery

2.6 **Table 2.3** outlines a profile of respondent LEAs based on the total number of learners enrolled in ACL in the last teaching year.

Table 2.3: Enrolments in ACL				
	Contracting Out	**Direct Delivery**	**Mixed Delivery**	**All**
Total	306,096	449,184	470,909	1,226,189
Average per LEA	7,119	12,140	15,191	11,047
Smallest No. enrolled	200	3,500	169	169
Largest No. enrolled	38,900	80,965	48,000	80,965

2.7   This profile identifies a number of key points:

- Contracting Out LEAs have on average the smallest number of enrolments, and indeed, the smallest LEA in terms of ACL enrolment contracts out;

- Mixed Delivery LEAs have on average the largest by number of enrolments, but the largest single LEA is a Direct Deliverer.

2.8   In addition to the 1.2 million ACL enrolments by LEAs for ACL, there are around 400,000 individual student records currently returned by LEAs to the LSC through their role as External Institutions. This represents around 5,600 ISR records per relevant Institution.

2.9   **Table 2.4** shows the number of outlets and contractors[1] that LEAs are currently working with to provide their required MI returns.

Table 2.4: Outlets and Contractors		
	Contractors	**Outlets**
Total	663	2,999
Average	9	38
Smallest No.	1	1
Largest No.	100	350

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[1] A contractor is an organisation with which the LEA contracts to provide ACL e.g a college, training provider or community group. An outlet is an LEA run centre through which directly delivered ACL provision is offered.

2.10 This analysis suggests that LEAs working with contractors have on average a smaller number of Institutions to collect data from than Direct Deliverers or Mixed Delivery LEAs. The implication of this is that data collection for Contracting Out organisations could prove a less burdensome task.

2.11 This implication is further supported by **Table 2.5**, which shows the average number of outlets and contractors by delivery model. This further analysis does, however, suggest that Mixed Delivery LEAs have a harder task than Direct Delivery LEAs, since they work with their contractors and a larger number of their own outlets.

Table 2.5: Average Number of Outlets and Contractors		
	Contractors	**Outlets**
Contracting Out	10	n/a
Direct Delivery	n/a	35
Mixed Delivery	8	50

2.12 The department responsible for the collection of ACL management information within the LEA varies to some extent, but in the main the activities are carried out by the Adult Education Departments (or their equivalent) themselves without input from others. Examples of the other departments used by LEAs include:

- "Corporate Data Office";
- "Post 16 IT Services Division";
- "Planning and Communications Department";
- "Research and Information Unit".

E-cultures

2.13 The general attitude towards the use of IT, or the e-culture, of an LEA will have a strong bearing on its ability to adapt to the advent of the ILR for ACL. LEAs with prior experience of ISR or with strong institutional IT support functions or a quantitative information/evidence culture are more likely to be able to address the issues relating to ILR system development. The difficulty within this research is trying to identify this e-culture, as there is no firm measure.

2.14 Below we have outlined the survey results from some of the possible indicators of e-culture and some key points from the case study analysis.

Use of MI

2.15 A key indicator of the motivations behind the provision of MI is its use. 87% of LEAs currently holding ISR information make further use of the MI they collect. This suggests an information culture within this group, which in turn suggests that MI systems are an important tool. Common types of analysis include:

- breakdowns of students by target groups;
- performance monitoring of individual outlets and contractors;
- monitoring achievement and retention rates;
- enrolments on specific courses;
- monitoring Audit Commission performance indicators;
- allocating funding units;
- analysis of participation in ACL.

2.16 The case study analysis further supports this view and suggests in fact that the use of MI internally is common across all delivery models. **Table 2.6** shows that six of the ten case studies use the management information they collect for their own purposes, and a further three make some limited use of the information. Within those that do make use of the MI they collect are two of the three Contracting Out LEAs.

2.17 There is again considerable consistency in the ways in which the information is analysed. Key themes include:

- monitoring of learning by geographic area, particularly around areas of disadvantage;

- quality assurance and performance against targets;

- learning penetration within key target groups, such as ethnic minorities and the disabled;

- monitoring course attendance.

	Yes/No	What is it used for?	Type/Level of Use?
**Table 2.6:** **Use of Management Information by Case Studies**		
DD1	No	Limited at present but progressing. Will increase when MI system fully on stream	
CO1	Yes	Quality of provision, geographic spread, progress on target groups, attendance and enrolment	Strategic Tool
MD1	Yes	Quality of provision, geographic spread (aiming to get provisional within ½ mile of every resident), progress on target groups, attendance and enrolment	Strategic Tool
DD2	Yes	Quality of provision, geographic spread, progress on target groups, attendance and enrolment	Strategic Tool and Operational Level – feedback to centres
MD2	No	Limited use	
MD3	Yes	Monitoring of audit commission indicators, analysis of retention and achievement, setting performance targets	Strategic and Operational Tool
DD3	Yes	Quality of provision, geographic spread, progress on target groups, attendance and enrolment and monitoring the LEA's Equal Opportunities.	Strategic Tool
CO2	Yes	Quality of provision, geographic spread, progress on target groups, attendance and enrolment	Strategic Tool
CO3	No		
DD4	No	Limited at present by flexibility of existing systems	
Source: Assessment by YCL Consultants		

2.18 The key difference between those that currently provide ISR information and those that do not, is the level at which the information is used within the LEA. The main audiences for this information are:

- **operational managers** – individuals managing contracts with outlets or contractors use the information to monitor performance by organisations within their field of responsibility;

- **strategic planners** – a lot of the information produced by LEAs feeds in to the wider strategic planning processes within the LEA and the Local Authority. It provides evidence and justification for policy direction.

2.19 Those LEAs who at present purely collect the summary information required by DfES for forms AE1 and AE2 do not use that information in this operational sense. They feel that the detail and the quality of the information they receive from their contractors and outlets is not sufficient to provide any meaningful guidance to contract management type discussions. These LEAs use this information only as part of their wider strategic planning processes, although again there are concerns over the quality of the information.

2.20 However, it should be noted that those with existing ISR systems do not all use the information in an operational sense, which suggests something about the information culture within these organisations. The MI they produce is mainly used at a strategic level. This suggests the main driver for its production is the requirement to provide ISR data to the LSC (and formerly the FEFC).

2.21 This pattern suggests that LEAs can be broadly grouped into three streams in relation to the use of MI:

- LEAs who currently collect only summary information, but use the limited information they have for strategic planning;

- LEAs who provide an ISR return and make some use of the information at a strategic level within the organisation, but for whom the main driver for collection is to secure funding;

- LEAs who collect a wide range of management information for their own operational and strategic purposes, from which they provide ISR returns.

2.22 The impact this assessment has on the LEAs readiness to implement an ILR MI system is clear. While a proportion will want to produce the information for their own needs, the majority will do it because they have to, and make some use of the extra information it provides.

IT Infrastructure

2.23 Another indicator of an LEA's attitude towards IT is the infrastructure available within the organisation. This information also has implications for the type of MI systems that could be implemented within LEAs as part of any prescribed solution for ILR.

2.24 We analyse below the specifications of some of the generic software available to LEAs. This is not intended to be a comprehensive assessment of the IT infrastructure within LEAs, but to provide a feel for the environment within which they are working and to provide proxy information in relation to the nature of hardware being used.

Operating systems

2.25 LEAs were asked to provide information on the operating systems being used on the PCs within the team responsible for Adult Learning MI.

2.26 All the LEAs responding to the survey use Microsoft Windows operating systems, however there is some variety in the versions in operation. **Table 2.7** outlines the number of LEAs using each version of Windows.

Table 2.7: LEAs PC Operating Systems							
	Contracting Out		**Direct Delivery**		**Mixed delivery**		**Total**	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Windows 95	9	18%	13	34%	10	29%	32	26%
Windows 98	19	39%	17	45%	12	35%	48	40%
Windows 2000	11	22%	5	13%	5	15%	21	17%
Windows NT4	8	16%	5	13%	10	29%	23	19%
No. of LEAs	*49*		*38*		*34*		*121*	

NB.
1. A number of LEAs are currently in transition between Windows versions and hence appear in 2 categories
2. Columns may not add up due to rounding

2.27 In the main, the analysis is broadly encouraging. All LEAs are using relatively recent operating systems and over 35% are using versions based on the latest Windows NT technology on at least some of their PCs. The most prevalent single operating system is Windows 98 (40%).

2.28 There seems to be little difference in the pattern for the different delivery models; in all cases, Windows 98 is the predominant system with substantial numbers also using NT technology through either Windows 2000 or NT itself.

2.29 The implication of this analysis of PC operating systems is that the PCs themselves must meet high hardware specifications. This in turn suggests that Adult Learning Teams within LEAs are maintaining a reasonably high level of PC infrastructure. More importantly, there is little difference between LEAs using different delivery models for ACL, which bodes well for the implementation of ILR systems in non-ISR providers.

Office Suite

2.30 **Table 2.8** shows the range and version of productivity suites used by LEAs in their ACL departments. Again this information helps to build up a picture of the IT systems available to LEAs.

Table 2.8: LEAs Productivity Software								
	Contracting Out		Direct Delivery		Mixed Delivery		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Microsoft Office								
95	0	0%	2	5%	1	3%	3	2%
97	27	55%	19	50%	21	62%	67	50%
2000	20	41%	14	37%	13	38%	47	39%
Total	**47**		**35**		**35**		**117**	
Lotus Smartsuite								
Millennium	1	2%	0	0%	1	3%	2	2%
Total	**1**	**2%**	**0**	**0%**	**1**	**3%**	**2**	**2%**
NB. A number of LEAs are currently in transition between office suite versions or use two packages								

2.31 Again this preliminary analysis is encouraging. Nearly 40% of LEAs are using year 2000 version office software, with the vast majority of the rest not far behind, using Microsoft Office 97. This pattern is repeated across the different delivery models.

2.32 This further supports the evidence from the operating system analysis that the PCs used within the LEA ACL teams are relatively new and high specification.

Networking

2.33 LEAs were also asked to provide information about the type of software used for networking within the LEA. This information is outlined in **Table 2.9**.

Table: 2.9 LEAs Networking Software							
	Contracting Out		Direct Delivery		Mixed Delivery		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Windows NT	17	35%	16	42%	22	65%	55	45%
Windows 2000 Server	0	0%	3	8%	4	12%	7	6%
Novell	15	31%	7	18%	8	24%	30	25%
Groupwise	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Unknown	12	24%	11	29%	4	12%	27	22%
NB. A number of LEAs are using a variety of networking software							

2.34 Although once again there are a considerable number of LEAs using modern up to date software, there are over a fifth that are unaware of the software used or more importantly are not part of a network. This could present problems for LEAs in the development of effective database systems.

2.35 The pattern across delivery models again broadly reflects the pattern amongst LEAs as a whole. Those using a Mixed Delivery model do use the latest Windows NT software in considerably greater numbers, but in terms of an overall assessment of LEAs' e-cultures this is unlikely to be significant.

Internet Access

2.36 Another key indicator of IT awareness and attitude is access to the Internet. This is particularly relevant bearing in mind the web portal solution to ILR collection being proposed by the LSC. **Table 2.10** outlines LEAs' statuses with regard to web access.

Table: 2.10 LEA PCs with Internet Access							
	Contracting Out		Direct Delivery		Mixed Delivery		Total
	No.	%	No.		No.		No.
All	22	46%	10	28%	8	24%	40	34%
Most	16	33%	11	31%	12	36%	39	33%
Some	9	19%	14	39%	13	39%	36	31%
None	1	2%	1	3%	0	0%	2	2%

2.37 Almost all (98%) of the LEAs responding had at least some PCs that could connect to the Internet, and indeed, a third reported that all their PCs have web access. It is interesting to note that Contracting Out LEAs are perhaps in the best position; 46% reported that all their PCs are connected to the Internet, compared to only 28% and 24% for Direct and Mixed Delivery LEAs. They also have the lowest proportion of LEAs with only 'some' PCs connected to the Internet.

2.38 Physical connection is, however, only half the story; the speed of that connection is also a key indicator. **Table 2.11** examines the connection speeds of respondents.

Table 2.11: LEAs Internet Connection 'Speed'								
	Contracting Out		Direct Delivery		Mixed Delivery		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
33 Bps	2	4%	0	0%	3	9%	5	4%
56 Bps	7	14%	4	11%	2	6%	13	11%
ISDN2 or higher	25	51%	25	66%	13	38%	63	52%
Unknown	15	31%	9	24%	16	47%	40	33%

2.39 Over half of the LEAs have an ISDN2 or higher Internet connection, which suggests a relatively high degree of usage and awareness. The frequency is particularly high amongst Direct Delivery and Contracting Out LEAs.

2.40 Another aspect of LEA's Internet awareness is the use of websites. The majority of Adult Education Services have a website (56%), but very few (only 8%) offer online enrolment as an option through this website.

2.41 The use of websites is also an area where Direct and Mixed Delivery LEAs seem to be ahead of those that contract out. Only 33% of Contracting Out LEAs have an Adult Education Service website, compared to 74% of Direct Deliverers and 69% of Mixed Delivery LEAs.

A Qualitative Perspective

2.42 The case study process has allowed us to examine in more depth the e-cultures of a sample of LEAs. We have tried to assess overall attitudes to IT and the degree to which these LEAs are information-driven and have expressed this assessment in a single phrase. This analysis is outlined below in **Table 2.12**.

	Table 2.12: **Assessments of LEA's Attitude to IT**
DD1	Proactive – extensive involvement in National Grid for Learning and have purchased an advanced new system
CO1	Proactive approach aimed at improving productivity
MD1	Reactive – mainly buy in expertise and there is little drive in house
DD2	Reactive – involvement in MI is largely to get funding, seems to be major use for IT
MD2	Reactive – IT is not a high priority for the LEA. However, are piloting a web based registration system
MD3	Proactive – the LEA develops its own IT systems. Has a good support function. All together an impressive IT culture
DD3	Reactive – buy in and use support. Wait and see rather than using IT proactively
CO2	Proactive – no ISR system at present, but are proactive in their use of IT in other areas
CO3	Reactive – little evidence of the use of IT systems beyond simple functions
DD4	Proactive – ICT is a core pillar of the current restructuring within the Local Authority and LEA
	Source: Assessment by YCL Consultants

2.43 Perhaps the key point to note from this exercise is that the delivery model and consequently the MI system for ACL do not necessarily reflect the e-culture of the individual organisation, a conclusion that supports the more quantitative evidence from the survey work. A number of the case study LEAs that are currently providing ISR information were felt to be largely reactive to IT issues. They use systems, such as ISR software, to produce information because they need it to secure funding; their involvement with IT is not driven by their own information needs.

2.44 Conversely, two of the LEAs that currently contract out ACL were felt to be proactive in their wider use of IT. One is currently heavily engaged in the development of a large UK Online bid (which has been a concurrent driving factor for the development of a more sophisticated MI system for ACL) and has a strategic planning culture that is heavily information-driven. The second LEA is currently investing heavily in IT infrastructure, including systems for provision of ILR, as part of a drive to *"use IT to improve productivity"*.

Existing Systems

2.45 LEAs currently use a wide variety of different systems for collecting management information on ACL. These range from simple paper-based filing systems for LEAs collecting summary information from relatively small numbers of contractors, to bespoke database packages capable of storing large numbers of individual records and producing user defined reports.

2.46 **Table 2.13** shows the types of system being used by LEAs to produce the summary AE1 and AE2 submissions currently required by DfES. This is also shown by type of LEA (i.e. Contracting Out, Direct Deliverer, or Mixed Delivery).

Table 2.13: Systems for Storing AE1 and AE2 Information							
	Paper		Spreadsheet		Database		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Contracting out LEAs	20	41%	21	43%	8	16%	49	100%
Direct Delivery LEAs	3	8%	7	18%	28	74%	38	100%
Mixed Delivery LEAs	5	15%	8	24%	21	62%	34	100%

2.47 The pattern is largely as expected. Contracting out LEAs in the main use paper and spreadsheet-based MI systems, often simply because the volume of data they are handling does not justify anything else. Around two thirds of Contracting Out LEAs suggested this as a reason for not using a database. Other key reasons cited by these LEAs were a lack of resources to implement a new system (24%) and a lack of access to appropriate software (12%).

2.48 The other two groups show a substantial bias towards database type systems. This reflects the fact that many ISR packages can simply print off an AE1/AE2 return as a standard report. Some others clearly use paper and spreadsheets to collate data sourced from ISR or similar systems, reflecting possible weaknesses in the reporting functions of their ISR databases.

2.49 LEAs collect management information for the AE1 and AE2 submissions from outlets and contractors in a variety of ways. Approximately half of LEAs use purely paper-based methods to collect this information and another fifth use purely electronic methods. The remaining third use a mixture of paper and electronic methods. These LEAs show a very slight bias towards paper-based systems (on average 50.3% of collections).

2.50 There is some evidence to suggest that paper-based methods are more prevalent amongst Contracting Out organisations, 60% use purely paper-based methods, than Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery organisations, 29% and 50% use purely paper-based systems respectively, but this should be tempered with evidence from the case study work that the method of transfer may not be a particularly effective measure of current readiness in relation to MI systems. A number of the case study LEAs that are currently providing ISR and must be considered as being in an advanced state of readiness still use paper-based collection systems. They cite reasons of data quality, accuracy and issues around audit trails as being key drivers in their decisions.

2.51 While all LEAs complete the summary data required by DfES, those funded directly by the LSC (previously the FEFC) to provide ACL as External Institutions are also required to provide the Individualised Student Record returns. This represents a considerably greater commitment in terms of detail and volume, and is probably the nearest current comparator for the ACL ILR for LEAs. **Table 2.14** outlines the systems being used by Direct and Mixed Delivery LEAs to provide this information.

Table 2.14: Systems for Storing ISR Information			
	Paper	**Spreadsheet**	**Database**	**Total**
Direct Delivery LEAs	0	0	32	32
Mixed Delivery LEAs	0	1	28	29
	0	1	60	61
NB. Not all relevant LEAs provided details of their ISR systems.			

2.52 This analysis demonstrates the first requirement for any LEA-based ILR system. It is clear that LEAs providing ISR information at present do not feel it is possible to work with this data without a comprehensive database system. Only one respondent uses a spreadsheet to make the return and they only use this method because the volumes of students are small.

2.53 The methods of collection used for ISR information do however show considerably more variety. Approximately 30% each of LEAs collect ISR information exclusively by paper-based or electronic methods. The remainder use a mixture of methods, but in the case of ISR data the bias is reversed towards electronic collection (on average electronic methods were used 67% of the time). This further demonstrates the step up from the summary style returns of AE1 and AE2 to the individualised nature of ISR. The volumes of data being transferred are such that electronic formats that can be easily integrated rather than re-entered are preferred.

Non-Schedule 2 Learners

2.54 Another of the key changes under the new ILR will be the requirement on LEAs to provide information on non-schedule 2 type learners[2]. In the past coverage in this area has been patchy due to the difficulties in collecting detailed information in this area and the collection of ILR data could prove very challenging.

2.55 The readiness of current ISR providers to provide data on non-schedule 2 learning is outlined in **Table 2.15**

Table 2.15: Current Treatment of Non-Schedule 2 Learners by ISR Providers	No.	%
Non-schedule 2 learners are fully integrated into the ISR system	30	54%
Non-schedule 2 learners are fully integrated but there are delays in entering them into the system	11	20%
The majority but not all non-schedule 2 learners are covered by the system	3	5%
There is only patchy coverage of non-schedule 2 learners	3	5%
There is no coverage of non-schedule 2 learners	9	16%

2.56 This analysis suggests that there is, in fact, reasonable coverage of non-schedule 2 learners by ISR providers already. Over half the LEAs have non-schedule 2 learners fully integrated within their ISR systems, while a further 20% integrate the information over time.

2.57 It should be noted that this may somewhat underestimate the difficulties relating to this process. A number of the case studies have expressed concerns over the viability of collection of data in this area. We will discuss these issues in greater depth in Section 3 on LEAs' ability to adapt to the ILR.

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[2] Non-Schedule 2 learners are those who are participating in courses that do not lead to an accredited qualification.

Costs of Existing MI Systems

2.58 This research has clearly identified two areas of clear cost implications for LEAs in the switch to an ILR based management information system:

- **IT costs** – these mainly revolve around the costs of database software; the set up, support and on-going licensing. In the main, hardware has not proved to be an issue for the majority of LEAs in relation to current systems;

- **'human' resource costs** – these relate to the impact on staff time from collection, data entry, validation and analysis of management information.
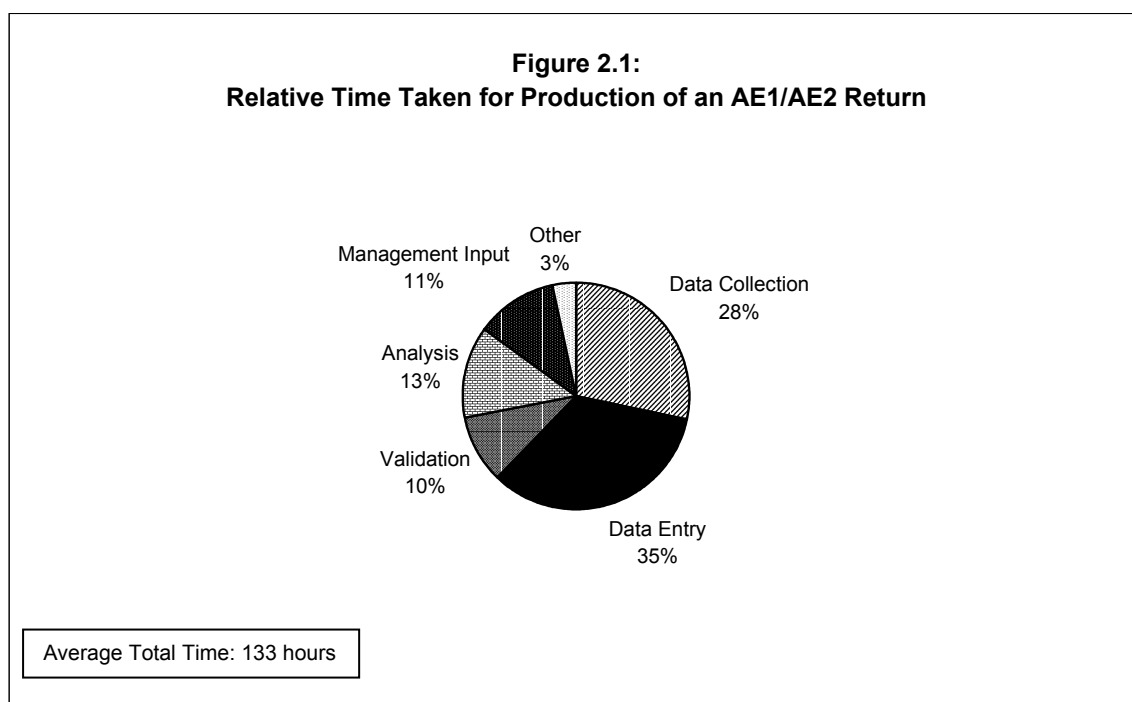
Providing AE1/AE2 Information

2.59 Based on information collected through the postal survey we have outlined below estimates of the costs of meeting the current management information requirements for ACL, the AE1 and AE2 forms, under each of our three delivery models. These estimates assume that software, be it a simple spreadsheet or a specialised database, is already in place and that the LEA makes the returns centrally. **Table 2.16** shows the cost per learner of providing an AE1/AE2 return.

Table 2.16: Cost per Learner of Producing AE1/AE2 Returns	
	£
Contracting Out	0.48
Direct Delivery	0.27
Mixed Delivery	0.42

2.60 This analysis suggests that at present the production of AE1/AE2 information is in fact a greater burden upon Contracting Out LEAs. This reflects the fact that AE1/AE2 is just a small part of the MI systems of Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery LEAs. As we have seen above, LEAs who directly deliver or provide ACL via both routes in the main have sophisticated database systems used for wider purposes, such as the provision of ISR information. These systems are often capable of simply printing off AE1/AE2 returns as a standard report, hence the time input on producing AE1/AE2 is minimal. It is interesting to note that the costs for Mixed Delivery LEAs are considerably higher than for Direct Delivery LEAs. This probably reflects the fact that the LEAs have to collate information from contractors and produce information from their own systems for their direct provision.

2.61 The division of time and consequently cost across the various tasks involved in providing an AE1/AE2 return is shown in **Figure 2.1**.

Figure 2.1:
Relative Time Taken for Production of an AE1/AE2 Return

Management Input 11%
Other 3%
Data Collection 28%
Analysis 13%
Validation 10%
Data Entry 35%

Average Total Time: 133 hours

2.62 The largest amount of time is spent on data entry. This is somewhat surprising considering the summary nature of the AE1/AE2, but probably reflects the time spent by Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery LEAs entering additional records not required for other MI returns into their database systems. Data entry is closely followed by the process of data collection from contractors and outlets with further analysis showing that this is a particular burden for Contracting Out LEAs (nearly 45% of the time taken to provide AE1/AE2 information).
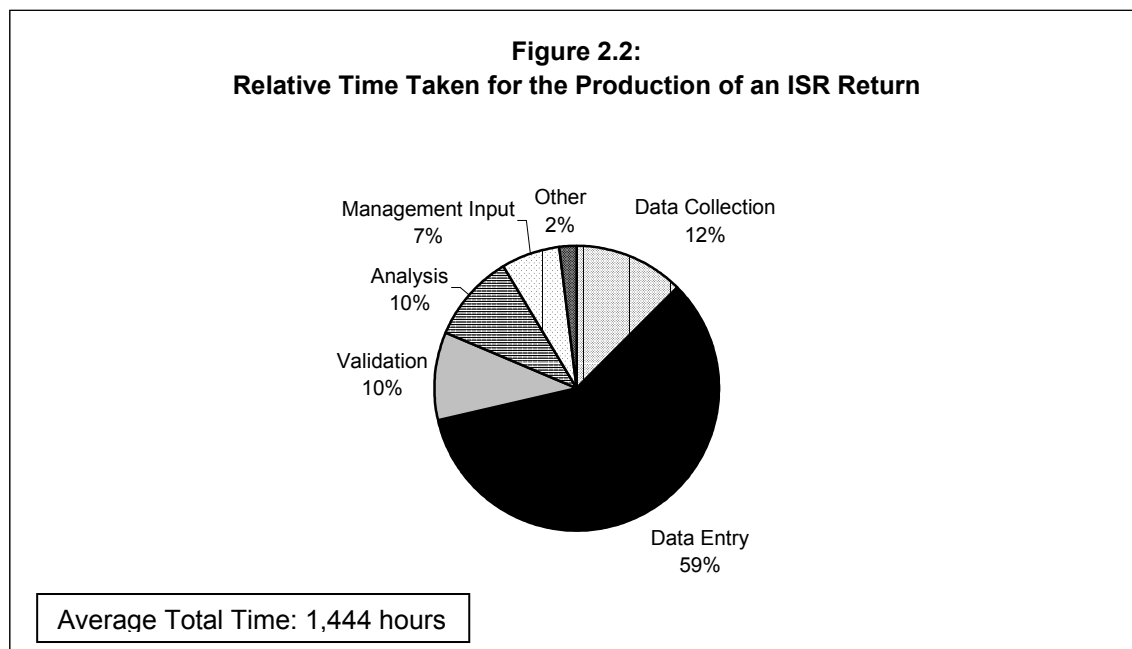
Providing ISR Information

2.63 By way of comparison we have also outlined the human resource costs currently faced by Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery LEAs in providing individualised ISR data as External Institutions to the FEFC (LSC). This more truly reflects their actual costs in providing their management information returns, as it captures the costs inherent in the collection of individualised data. For the moment we have not included any software costs in this calculation. The results of this analysis are shown in **Table 2.17**.

Table 2.17: Cost per Learner of Providing ISR Information	
	£
Direct Delivery	4.66
Mixed Delivery	5.34

2.64 The message from this analysis is clear. The cost per learner of providing this type of individualised data is substantially higher than that incurred for the purely summary information requested by AE1/AE2 forms. This demonstrates quite clearly the magnitude of the cost implications facing Contracting Out LEAs and any others not currently collecting individualised learner information.

2.65 **Figure 2.2** repeats the analysis undertaken above of the relative time taken for different tasks within the production of AE1/AE2 for an ISR return.

**Figure 2.2:
Relative Time Taken for the Production of an ISR Return**

Management Input
7%

Other
2%

Data Collection
12%

Analysis
10%

Validation
10%

Data Entry
59%

Average Total Time: 1,444 hours

2.66 The diagram further demonstrates the essential difference between the nature of the two types of MI return. The proportion of time devoted to data entry is almost double that required for AE1/AE2, which demonstrates the burden currently placed on Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery LEAs by the requirement for individualised data. If all LEAs are to provide this type of data for ACL then there must be a significant increase in the resources available for data entry, particularly amongst Contracting Out LEAs.

Overall Costs for a 'Typical' LEA

2.67 **Table 2.18** seeks to identify the current costs of providing the necessary MI for a 'typical' LEA under each delivery model based on the information above, including the provision of an ISR for relevant Institutions. In addition we have included an estimate of the costs of a simple database for the provision of ISR information[3]. Contracting Out LEAs are assumed to be using either manual or spreadsheet methods that do not have an additional cost.

2.68 For the purposes of this analysis a typical LEA has 11,000 enrolments per year and collects information in mainly paper-based format and inputs it centrally. These assumptions are in line with the analysis of the current position of LEAs above.

Table 2.18: Costs of Providing Current Levels of MI for LEAs			
	Contracting Out	**Direct Delivery**	**Mixed Delivery**
Database set-up, training, year 1 license (inc. support)	£0	£7,375[1]	£7,375[1]
License (inc. support) for subsequent years	£0	£4,125[1]	£4,125[1]
Resource Cost of AE1/AE2 returns	£5,263	£2,983	£4,661
Resource Cost of ISR returns	£0	£51,234	£58,769
Total Cost in Year 1	**£5,263**	**£61,592**	**£70,805**
Total cost in Year 2	**£5,263**	**£58,342**	**£67,555**
1. These costs are based on average prices from existing software providers			

2.69 The results of this analysis are as would be expected. The cost burden of providing the current required MI is vastly lower on Contracting Out LEAs. While the software used by Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery LEAs affords them an advantage in the production of AE1 and AE2 returns, the human resource burden of collecting the individualised data required for ISR returns is huge in comparison. For our 'typical' LEA the additional cost of providing an ISR or similar individualised data as opposed to AE1/AE2 data is over £50,000 a year.

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[3] The costs identified within the model are based on information provided by current ISR software vendors and on estimates of time costs provided by LEAs in relation to their current management information commitments.

2.70 If we assume that the ILR is going to place a similar degree of resource pressure on LEAs as the current ISR, it is possible to begin to see the resource constraints that will impact heavily on Contracting Out LEAs readiness to provide ILR. In addition a number of Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery LEAs will need additional resources to handle the increased numbers of learners for whom individualised data is now a requirement.

LEAs Assessment of Readiness

2.71 As part of the postal survey LEAs were asked to make an assessment of their current readiness to provide ILR information. This is outlined in **Table 2.19**.

Table 2.19: LEAs Current Readiness to Provide ILR Data							
	Contracting Out		Direct Deliverers		Mixed Delivery		Total
We hope to be able to produce an ILR return dataset right away for all contractors and as an External Institution	4	10%	8	23%	9	27%	21	19%
We could produce an ILR return in our capacity as an External Institution/Direct Deliverer alone	0	0%	11	31%	14	42%	25	23%
We have a fully functioning database system, but not in ILR format	3	7%	12	34%	5	15%	20	18%
We have a partial IT system	12	29%	3	9%	4	12%	19	17%
We have no IT based management system	11	26%	1	3%	0	0%	12	11%
We can guarantee the data through a third party	12	29%	0	0%	1	3%	13	12%

2.72 At present only 21 of the LEAs who have responded feel that they could provide ILR data for all aspects of their ACL provision. This is perhaps unsurprising considering the present lack of information about the precise nature and specification of the ILR, but still represents a low proportion. It is interesting to note that 4 of these LEAs are Contracting Out Institutions.

2.73 As a whole, the current readiness of LEAs to provide ILR information is low. As you would expect LEAs with previous experience of ISR returns seem to be in a better position; over 85% feel that at the very least they have a fully functioning database, but not in ILR format. The primary concern must be for Contracting Out Institutions, where over half have no better than a partial IT based system. This is a conclusion that has been substantially supported by the case study work to date. There can be little doubt that the LEAs operating an ISR system at present are more confident and prepared for the change to an ILR system.

An Overall Assessment of Readiness

2.74 The analysis above identifies a number of key conclusions in relation to the current readiness of LEAs to provide ILR data:

- the evidence of organisations' e-cultures is broadly encouraging. The infrastructure within LEAs seems to be generally modern if not 'state of the art' and the vast majority have an Internet connection and hence the ability to interact with the LSC's web portal. The use of management information, while patchy, is sufficiently regular across delivery models to suggest that LEAs will see the benefits of providing ILR information;

- the negative side to this assessment of e-culture is the lack of proactivity within LEAs. Many seem to use the MI they collect to some extent, but the primary driver is the accessing of funding;

- the areas of existing systems and costs perhaps best demonstrate the core concerns around LEAs current readiness. Both of these areas demonstrate the gulf that has to be made up by Contracting Out LEAs to reach their ISR providing cousins. Contracting Out LEAs have little in the way of database systems at present and are faced with a potentially massive increase in human resources costs to facilitate collection;

- LEAs' own assessment of their readiness sums up the current situation well. The majority of current ISR providers are reasonably confident about their current readiness, while Contracting Out LEAs are in the main concerned about their readiness. The evidence from the case study work strongly supports this view.

3   ADAPTING TO THE ILR

Introduction

3.1   In this section we assess the ability of LEAs to build on their existing positions and adapt to the demands of the new ILR. The section is structured as follows:

- planning for the change;
- key barriers;
- can LEAs do it?

Planning for the Change

3.2   The switch to an ILR system is going to have a variable degree of impact on LEAs.   Those with existing ISR systems may already have a strong infrastructure in place and will be seeking to build on these systems. At the other end of the spectrum LEAs who contract out the provision of ACL have a considerable amount of development work to undertake both in terms of the development or purchase of a database system and in the administrative processes to support the collection of learner information.

> *"The development of the software itself is considerably less than half the battle. The real difficulty is identifying a collection system that works for you and then resourcing it"*
>
> ISR Software Vendor

3.3   The readiness of LEAs to adapt to the implementation of the ILR will be strongly linked to their planning processes. **Table 3.1** sets out the position of respondents to the postal survey in planning for the transition to the provision of ILR information.

3.4   This suggests that the majority of LEAs are aware of the issues presented by the ILR, however only around 60% are actively planning for the change over and even fewer (19%) have identified a budget.   There seems to be something of a sit and wait mentality in the approach of many LEAs.

3.5   Of particular concern must be the 16% that have so far not thought about the change over.   This concern intensifies when analysed by delivery model, since the vast majority of LEAs in this situation currently Contract Out.

Table 3.1: Planning for the ILR Transition								
	Contracting Out		Direct Deliverer		Mixed Delivery		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
The LEA is planning for it, and have set aside a budget to upgrade our systems/infrastructure and staffing	8	16%	9	24%	7	21%	23	19%
The LEA is planning for it, but have yet to make a budget allocation for this development	13	27%	18	47%	16	47%	47	39%
The LEA is awaiting publication of an outline ILR specification	17	35%	9	24%	15	44%	41	34%
The LEA is awaiting the outcome of DfES enquiries, including this survey	22	45%	7	18%	11	32%	40	33%
The LEA has not yet thought about it – this survey may prompt us to do so	17	35%	1	3%	1	3%	19	16%
NB. A number of LEAs considered themselves to be currently undertaking more than one of the above activities. Therefore columns will not sum to 100%								

3.6   Across the various delivery models the pattern reflects experience with ISR. The Direct and Mixed Delivery LEAs have this experience, they have perhaps a better understanding of the issues, and consequently they are further down the line in their planning for the change. Here the element of 'sit and wait' is perhaps unsurprising and of less concern, as they are at a point in some cases where they need the ILR specification to start actually reengineering their database systems.

> *"We have reshuffled the administrative resources for the change to ILR and identified what additional personnel we require, what is left to do is reengineer and update our software. Unfortunately we can't do this without the specification for the ILR."*
>
> ISR Providing LEA

3.7   The main concern is that many Contracting Out LEAs have decided to 'sit and wait' and in some cases they have not even made a conscious decision to examine the requirements of the ILR.

3.8   The evidence from the case study LEAs suggests that the 'sit and wait' mentality amongst Contracting Out LEAs stems from a lack of understanding of some of the issues and in some cases a feeling that they do not know where to start. However, as with the Direct and Mixed Delivery providers there is evidence to suggest that, although they are awaiting developments, there are basic structures being put in place.

> *"We are beginning to put systems in place. The most significant development so far is that we have introduced a common enrolment form."*
>
> *"We have set up a steering group within the LEA to address the development of systems and we are working with a software consultant to look at a number of options."*
>
> *"We have been concerned with the development of our MIS infrastructure for some time and have recently invested in a software package."*
>
> Contracting Out Case Study Consultees

3.9   **Table 3.2** shows our overall assessment of the case studies' positions in relation to planning for the ILR. This also outlines an assessment of their:

- **distance to travel** – this is an assessment of the size of the task facing the individual LEAs. This is based upon previous MIS experience, what they have done in preparation for the ILR so far and the e-culture of the organisation;

- **understanding of the issues** surrounding the development of ILR systems. This assessment is deliberately crude, we have classified LEAs as either understanding or not understanding, to allow for a clear picture, but it should be remembered that in reality there is considerable variation in the levels of understanding.

Case Study	Distance to Travel	Understanding of the Issues	Planning
DD1	Medium	Yes	Significant Progress
CO1	Medium	Yes	Significant Progress
MD1	Medium	Yes	Wait and See
DD2	Short	Yes	Significant Progress
MD2	Medium	Yes	Wait and See
MD3	Short	Yes	Significant Progress on Admin/ Wait and See on IT
DD3	Medium	Yes	Wait and See
CO2	Long	No	Some Progress
CO3	Long	No	Some Progress
DD4	Medium	Yes	Wait and See
Source: Assessment by YCL Consultants			

Table 3.2: Status of LEA Planning Processes

3.10 The table reinforces the messages above. While none of the LEAs were felt to be advanced in their planning, those that have made significant progress are in the main current providers of ISR information with either a relatively short or medium distance to travel. There is, however, one Contracting Out LEA within this group who has already invested in an IT system and is putting in place collection mechanisms.

3.11 Those with the most work to do are the LEAs who are least well prepared and the least advanced in their planning, and it seems no coincidence that they are both currently Contracting Out LEAs.

3.12 Those who were felt to be waiting to see what happens are all either currently providing ISR returns or are at least collecting individualised data. This lack of action has impacted on our perceptions of their distance to travel, although they have experience of ISR/individualised data, they were all considered to have a medium distance to travel.

Key Barriers

3.13 The barriers facing LEAs in making the transition from existing management information requirements to the new Individual Learner Record system are considerable and to a large extent beyond the control of individual LEAs. They are issues that need to be addressed through the planning processes discussed above and some have wider implications for the LSC's implementation of the ILR in Adult and Community Learning.

3.14 A wide variety of issues have been identified both through the postal survey and the case study work. Outlined below are the key areas of concern identified by LEAs.

Lack of Resources

3.15 The resource implications of the switch to ILR is an area that is concerning many LEAs, particularly those that currently contract out. Two thirds of the case study LEAs and nearly a half of the postal survey respondents mentioned that they would need to find additional resources.

3.16 The precise application of these resources varies across LEAs. The switch to individualised data has implications for staff time and hence cost in the immediate set up of any ILR system, but many are also concerned about the longer term training implications of maintaining a system. Many are also concerned about choosing the right software and its hardware implications, which again will impact on costs.

3.17 Contracting Out LEAs are in most cases in the worst position. Many will need to implement an entirely new system, both IT and administrative, to enable the collection of individualised data. As we have seen in Section 2, the cost implications of this are potentially high. A typical LEA with 11,000 students will probably need to find around £50,000 a year.

3.18 Direct Delivery LEAs are in possibly the best position, as in most cases the majority of their provision is currently covered by ISR data collection. However, even here a number of the case study LEAs have indicated that they will need development money for new systems, and extra staff to allow for the current expected growth in ACL and the need to collect more information from non-schedule 2 learners.

3.19 Mixed Delivery LEAs represent something of a halfway house. In the main they have existing ISR systems and hence have the capability to collect individualised data for at least some of their provision. The resource issue for these LEAs is mainly around finding additional staff to take account of the additional collections to be made from their contracted out provision and around ensuring that IT infrastructure is in place to allow for expansion.

Staff Skills

3.20 A number of LEAs have expressed concern at the level of skill required to operate existing ISR systems, which they feel will not change with the ILR. This is not so much an issue of IT skills, as people can be relatively easily trained to enter data, it is more about the ability of staff at data entry level to identify errors in data and interpret unclear information. The role entails a sound knowledge of the local learning environment. Areas that cause particular problems are: setting up course information, postcode information, entering withdrawals information and short courses.

> *"However good your existing system is, if people are putting dross in, all that you will get out the other end is dross!"*
>
> Direct Delivery LEA

3.21 The implication for LEAs of this problem is clear; they cannot use standard data input staff to process this data. The data needs to be processed by staff with knowledge of the funding streams for Adult Learning and who understood the importance of getting the information right.

3.22 A related problem is different interpretation of data, again particularly around the setting up of course details. Two LEAs who were spoken to as part of the case study work have changed their whole approach to data collection due to problems in the interpretation of data.

> *"When we started providing ISR data all the information was input in local centres, but we found that the level of consistency and quality was such that validation became a major problem. We have therefore reverted to a paper-based centralised input system"*
>
> *"We collect information from around 80 different centres and it became clear very rapidly that we couldn't hope to achieve consistency with localised entry"*
>
> Direct Delivery LEAs

3.23 This skills issue will impact particularly heavily on LEAs without experience of ISR, who may not fully understand the importance of these data issues.

Impact on Basic Skills and Threshold Learners

3.24 A concern expressed by all the LEAs visited during the case study process was the potential impact of the collection of ILR type information on some learner groups, such as:

- basic skills learners;
- those involved in study groups;
- those on threshold or taster courses.

3.25 The nature of adult learning is such that it attracts large numbers of learners from such groups and there are difficult issues around the collection of detailed ILR type information from these groups.

3.26 For study group type learners there is concern that learners will object to providing detailed information, particularly age, ethnicity and funding status information. The past experience of LEAs in this area is mixed, some felt this group had proved difficult in the past, while others were surprised that some had had problems.

3.27 The problems relating to the remaining groups are perhaps more serious. A number of LEAs outlined the importance of threshold or taster type learning in their area. This learning often involves very short courses, maybe even just a single two hour session, designed to get people back into learning, a key objective nationally and for many LEAs. A number of case study LEAs expressed concerns that asking for large amounts of information in this context will impact negatively on attendance on courses.

3.28 Basic skills learners are not only affected by the issues mentioned above, but also present a resource problem for outlets in that many learners will need assistance in completing the forms.

3.29 The implication here is really for the LSC and its funding model. If these types of activity are to continue to be delivered effectively it may need to consider a reduced form of ILR, or possibly block funding for some areas.

Capacity within Contractors and Outlets

3.30 The capacity of contractor organisations and of specific delivery outlets to provide this level of detailed information is another area of concern, particularly for Contracting Out LEAs.

3.31 **Table 3.3** shows LEAs' responses in relation to the readiness of their contractors and outlets to provide ILR information.

Table 3.3 Readiness of Contracting Organisations/ Outlets to Provide ILR Information	Contracting Out		Direct Delivery		Mixed Delivery		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
All Institutions will be able to provide ILR data with minimal delay	10	22%	17	55%	17	50%	44	40%
The majority of Institutions should be able to provide ILR information with minimal delay, but there are a number of groups where problems may be experienced	22	49%	7	23%	16	47%	45	41%
Few Institutions will be able to provide ILR information in the short run	10	22%	5	16%	1	3%	16	15%
Our contractors/outlets will not be able to supply ILR information	3	7%	2	6%	0	0%	5	5%

3.32 The data suggests that in the long term it should be possible to extract ILR information from contractors and outlets. However, in the short run, only around 40% of LEAs feel that this is possible immediately for all their contractors and outlets, and this figure drops to only 22% for Contracting Out LEAs.

3.33 The majority of the remaining LEAs feel that they should be able to collect ILR information from most with minimal delay but there are concerns about some categories of providers. These concerns revolve around voluntary and community groups and providers, where many LEAs feel that both the administrative and IT infrastructures are not advanced enough to complete the task. This is of particular concern in relation to ACL because the provision provided by these groups is often targeted at non-learners and other traditionally excluded groups.

3.34 As well as being concerned about organisations that cannot provide ILR information, Contracting Out LEAs are most concerned about those that will not. A number have expressed concerns that some large providers will not be prepared to let them have information collected about their learners in the detail required to provide ILR or that the information provided will not be compatible with their systems once developed. A considerable amount of time will have to be spent working with contractors to develop data specifications and standards.

Delays in Software Development

3.35 One of the key constraints on the further development of existing ISR systems within relevant LEAs is that they rely on software houses to provide appropriate updates.

3.36 Around a fifth of LEAs responding to the postal survey mentioned delays in software development as one of the main constraints on the development of ILR systems. The case study analysis also highlighted this is an area of weakness, particularly amongst the less proactive ISR providing LEAs. There seemed to be a feeling amongst this group that this development was a 'given' and there was no evidence of any form of contingency plans.

3.37 Discussions with a number of software vendors suggests that, while it is true that actually producing the software is not a problem, they will need a substantial lead-in time to reengineer the software and test it against the ILR specification when it is produced. The consensus was that development of existing systems to meet the new specifications would probably take around 12 to 18 months.

> *"It could take as much as much as 18 months to reengineer and respecify our system and then implement with our clients. Time is getting short"*
>
> Software Vendor

3.38 Overall, possible delays in software development must be considered a serious potential barrier for LEAs in meeting the deadline of September 2003, especially as no specification exists at present and in light of previous problems with major updates identified by a number of current ISR providers.

Lack of Information from the LSC

3.39 One of the key barriers for LEAs revolves around the present lack of an ILR specification from the LSC. Many of the case study LEAs, software vendors and other LEAs with whom we have had discussions have expressed frustration with the level of information coming from the LSC in relation to the ILR for ACL. This lack of information seems to be one of the key contributory factors in the decision to 'sit and wait' that is evident amongst LEAs.

> *"We are keen to get on with the job but without knowing more about what is required we don't feel we can make much progress."*
>
> *"Investing in the wrong system is potentially a serious cost for us. We are waiting to find out more about what is happening."*
>
> *"We feel that we have done all we can for the moment. We have a good administrative system in place, but we need to work on the other side of it now and at present we can't."*
>
> Sample of LEA Comments

IT Hardware Capacity

3.40 While hardware capacity has not proved to be a major issue for many LEAs and discussions with software vendors were positive with regard to minimum requirements for systems, a few LEAs have expressed concern, particularly in relation to networking and connectivity.

3.41 A number of LEAs consulted either have databases that are on a wide area network or are seeking to use thin client technology for entering learner information. These LEAs have identified existing network infrastructures and connection speeds as a potential barrier to the development of ILR due to the increased data flow that will be inherent.

3.42 A number of Contracting Out and Mixed Delivery LEAs have also mentioned concerns over server capacity. They feel that the need to store the additional records created from their contracted out provision could overload existing systems.

Learner Identifier

3.43 One of the wider issues for the development of the ILR system is the identification of a unique identifier for learners. This is a problem that is mirrored at LEA level.

3.44 A unique identifier is key to the production of accurate MI. For instance it allows individual learners to be attached to multiple cross-site enrolments to prevent double counting and it allows accurate tracking of learner progression.

3.45 The case study research has identified two approaches to the problem:

- a number of the database systems used by LEAs at present to provide ISR data use a **series of identifiers** to pull out duplicate records from the records. For instance the system might compare the name, postcode and date of birth and produce a report for records where all three of these match. Extending this process to a national level would be possible but there would be considerable resource implications for the LSC;

- one interesting solution adopted by an LEA, that currently directly delivers ACL, is to issue an **identification card** on enrolment, which includes a unique identifier. This card can then be used whenever the learner enrols for another course. This system is backed up with checks as per the system above. While this system can be regarded as good practice for LEAs, and it would be possible to extend the number to identify source LEA to allow cross boundary tracking, a national system may be impractical.

Can LEAs do it?

3.46 As we have mentioned above there is considerable variation in the distance to be travelled by LEAs in making the switch to an ILR system. Those with experience of ISR systems are at a clear advantage and should have fewer difficulties, while those who currently only provide the AE1/AE2 summary data to DfES are entering a completely new arena. **Table 3.4** shows LEAs' own assessments of their ability to collect, collate and process the ILR information.

Table 3.4: **Collecting and Collating ILR Data**							
	Certain		**Confident**		**Doubtful**		**LEA can't**
Contracting Out	3	7%	19	43%	18	41%	4	9%
Direct Deliverer	14	37%	15	39%	7	18%	2	5%
Mixed Delivery	9	27%	20	61%	3	9%	1	3%
All LEAs	26	23%	54	47%	28	24%	7	6%

3.47 Across all LEAs there seems to be a relatively high degree of confidence in the ACL team's ability to collect and collate ILR data (70% are at least confident), but this masks the main problem area.

3.48 The LEAs with the furthest distance to travel in developing systems, those that contract out all ACL, show a much lower level of confidence in their ability. Half of this group feel that it is unlikely or impossible that they will be able to handle the collection and collation of ILR data.

3.49 **Table 3.5** shows our assessment of the ability of each of the case study LEAs to provide an ILR, a brief phrase expressing the reasons behind assessment and the key issues for each LEA.

3.50 This analysis follows the pattern set out above. Two of the Contracting Out Case Studies are the least likely to be able to meet the demands of the ILR, both citing resource constraints as a major issue. The other has made a good start and has invested in a database system and it seems likely that it should be able to meet the requirements.

3.51 The remaining LEAs are all felt to be in a good position to meet the requirements of the ILR, mainly because of their previous experience with ISR, but most believe that the change in systems will require some increase in the human resources required. One concern for all but Case Study 8 (who develop their own systems) is the ability of software vendors to provide updates to their existing software.

3.52 In summary, the ability of LEAs to adapt to the ILR MI requirements strongly reflects current delivery models. Those with experience of ISR are in the main in a much stronger position than those without.

	Yes/No	Reasoning	Key Issues
Table 3.5: **Can LEA's do it?** **– an assessment of the Case Studies**			
DD1	Yes	The LEA has invested in a new system and seems to be well forward in managing culture change issues and additional resources required.	• employment of an MIS manager • improved (preferably broadband) connectivity for centres
CO1	Yes	The LEA has invested in a system. Strong support for process in the LEA. Significant progress in planning.	• more resource for collecting and inputting data (at least 1 FTE plus other staff time)
MD1	Yes	Long embedded ISR system and hence good experience.	• concerns over connectivity with some centres • lack of support for hardware
DD2	Yes	Long embedded ISR system and experienced team. Clearly planning ahead.	• need more resource for inputting (1.5 FTE) • provision of updates from software vendor
MD2	Yes	Switch in database systems but new software largely in place. May be some issues over collection.	• new system largely untested • little drive for MI for own purposes
MD3	Yes	Good IT infrastructure and culture. Embedded ISR system and consequently good experience.	• time to redevelop database systems
DD3	Yes	Embedded ISR system. Some issues over collection system.	• more resource required for collection and entry (not quantified as yet) • provision of updates from software vendor
CO2	No	Good information culture and experience from other MIS. Have started planning, but have a long way to go.	• resources for database system and admin support • lack of time
CO3	No	Weak information culture and largely reactive in terms of IT. No systems in place. Has made a start but a long way to go.	• lack of experience • lack of resources for all areas of development
DD4	Yes	Good level of IT support, currently collecting individualised data on all ACL learners.	• database system needs development • training for staff
Source: Assessment by YCL Consultants			

4 WORKING WITH THE WEB PORTAL

Introduction

4.1 In this section we examine LEAs' views on working with the LSC's proposed solution for collecting ILR information, the web portal. The remainder of this section is structured as follows:

- background to the web portal;
- models of delivery;
- LEA reactions;
- the compromise solution.

Background to the Web Portal

4.2 The LSC is developing a variety of systems to support management information collection in relation to the learning it funds. One of the core elements of this is the development of the four categories of Individual Learner Record, one of which is the ILR for ACL.

4.3 In order to collect and share this ILR data effectively the LSC has identified the development of a web portal as the most efficient way forward. At present, the portal is still in the early phases of development, as groundwork on the specification of the ILR for ACL still needs to be undertaken. Therefore much of the analysis below is based on a fairly broad interpretation of the Portal's operation.

4.4 The collection of data through the portal will be possible in two ways:

- an LEA/provider could enter individual records on to the central LSC database through online forms on the Portal;

- large volumes of records could be uploaded through the portal by an LEA/provider as an output file from a database.

4.5 This obviously offers considerable flexibility to an LEA interacting with the Portal and, in theory, could remove the necessity for a database at LEA level. The only fundamental requirement for entering data is web access.

4.6 As implied by its title, the Web Portal will be a two way resource. LEAs will be able to query the data held centrally by the LSC to produce their own management information reports. It may also provide opportunities for benchmarking and the sharing of information across LEAs.

4.7 Some possible models for the operation of this process for ACL MI are examined below.

Models of Delivery

4.8 We have identified two basic models for the operation of LEA ACL MI systems with the LSC web portal. These models represent the two extreme options:

- **Direct Model** – all contracted providers or Direct Deliverer outlets enter data directly on to the LSC database through the web portal; either using online forms for small volumes or uploading compatible database files. The LEA holds no data centrally, but uses the LSC central database to produce its MI reports;

- **Centralised Model** – the LEA collects information from all its contractors or outlets and enters them on to a centrally held database. Compatible output files are then uploaded from this database, through the web portal, to the LSC.

Direct Model

4.9 **Figure 4.1** shows how this model might work. The main advantage of this model for LEAs is the resource saving. The LEA is not involved in the collection, entry or validation of the data and does not have to hold a central database. This is reflected in comments made by a number of LEAs:

- *"This method would allow us to regularly monitor Adult Education provision without the expense of developing the systems to pull in information from elsewhere"*;

- *"This route seems to offer a better and more efficient use of resources"*;

- *"We would be interested in the longer term as clearly there are resource savings, but we would want to see it working first!"*.

Figure 4.1:
Direct Model

LSC ILR Database

Portal

LEA

Contractor/
Outlet A

Contractor/
Outlet B
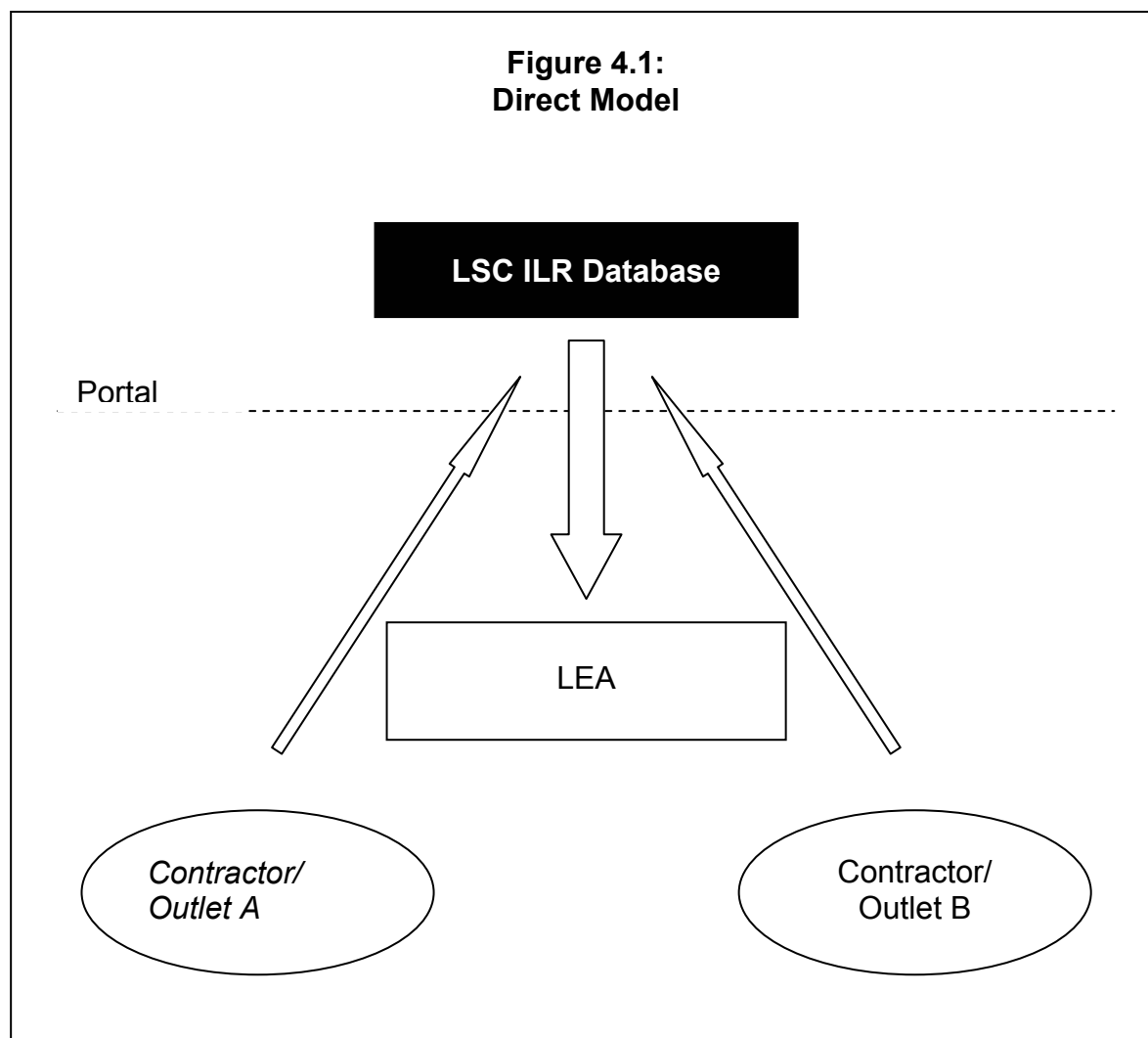
4.10 The main advantage of this model is clear; it is the overall level of resources required. Under any system individualised data will have to be collected at contractor/outlet level, the option is where does it go from there. This direct model cuts out the middleman, in this case the LEA, and delivers data directly to the LSC. There is no need for the LEA to become involved in collection, collation, validation or reporting. In other words there is no central resource, IT or administrative effort required. The savings for an LEA, particularly a Contracting Out organisation with no system at present, are considerable.

4.11 In spite of the resource advantages provided by the above model many LEAs do have concerns about their contractors and outlets entering direct on to the web portal. These concerns centre around a number of key areas:

- **validation and data quality** is a concern for many LEAs. They feel that the quality of the data they receive at present is on the whole poor. With this direct system they feel there will be insufficient checks at an LEA level where mistakes can be noticed;

- **analysis** is another area of concern. Many LEAs are uncomfortable with not having complete ownership of the ILR data. They feel that without the data being held in a database over which they have control of design, there may be limits to the analysis they can do;

- **flexibility** could also be a major issue for some more advanced LEAs. A number of the case study LEAs felt that this route would severely limit the data they could collect. At present the majority of the case studies who currently provide ISR data collect a range of additional data for their own purposes. It is difficult to see how this could be accommodated within this model;

- **small providers** may not have the skills or equipment to interact with the web portal. This could create a gap in the information provided, particularly in relation to non-schedule 2 and 'threshold' type courses or perhaps more seriously lead to LEAs reducing or ceasing funding to these providers;

- **ownership and responsibility** – some LEAs feel that the provision of this data is their responsibility and hence they want to retain control of the data and systems to ensure quality and integrity of the data;

- **the LSC is not the only funder**. One LEA consulted made this very valid point. As a direct deliverer of Adult Learning they receive funding from a wide variety of sources, all with varying management information requirements. Any MI system they use must be capable of dealing with all these needs, otherwise, however resource light this model is, it is a separate system to run with attendant costs.

Centralised Model

4.12 **Figure 4.2** demonstrates how this model might work. The main advantage of this model for LEAs is that they retain control of the data collected, an issue that is important to a large number of LEAs.

4.13 In this model contractors and outlets provide returns to the LEA (this could either be done electronically or via a paper system depending on preference), who then enter and store them on a central database. This database is then used to make returns to the LSC through the web portal using a database output file.

4.14 This model addresses many of the concerns raised by LEAs with regard to the direct model. It allows them to:

- undertake their own **validation** and **quality** checks on the data received from contractors and outlets. A number of LEAs believe undertaking this process at local level is vital if any meaningful data is to be collected. The LSC is too far removed from local providers to effectively chase and check returns;

- the design of the database and the choice of system remains completely within the control of the LEA. Therefore, LEAs are in complete control of **analysis and reporting functions** for their own MI needs and it allows for **flexibility** in data collected;

- the **collection process** can be varied to take account of the needs of individual outlets or contractors. For instance an LEA could choose to receive data from a large college in electronic format, while receiving paper returns from small providers, such as voluntary and community groups.

Figure 4.2:
Centralised Model

LSC ILR Database

Portal

LEA

Contractor/
Outlet A

Contractor/
Outlet B
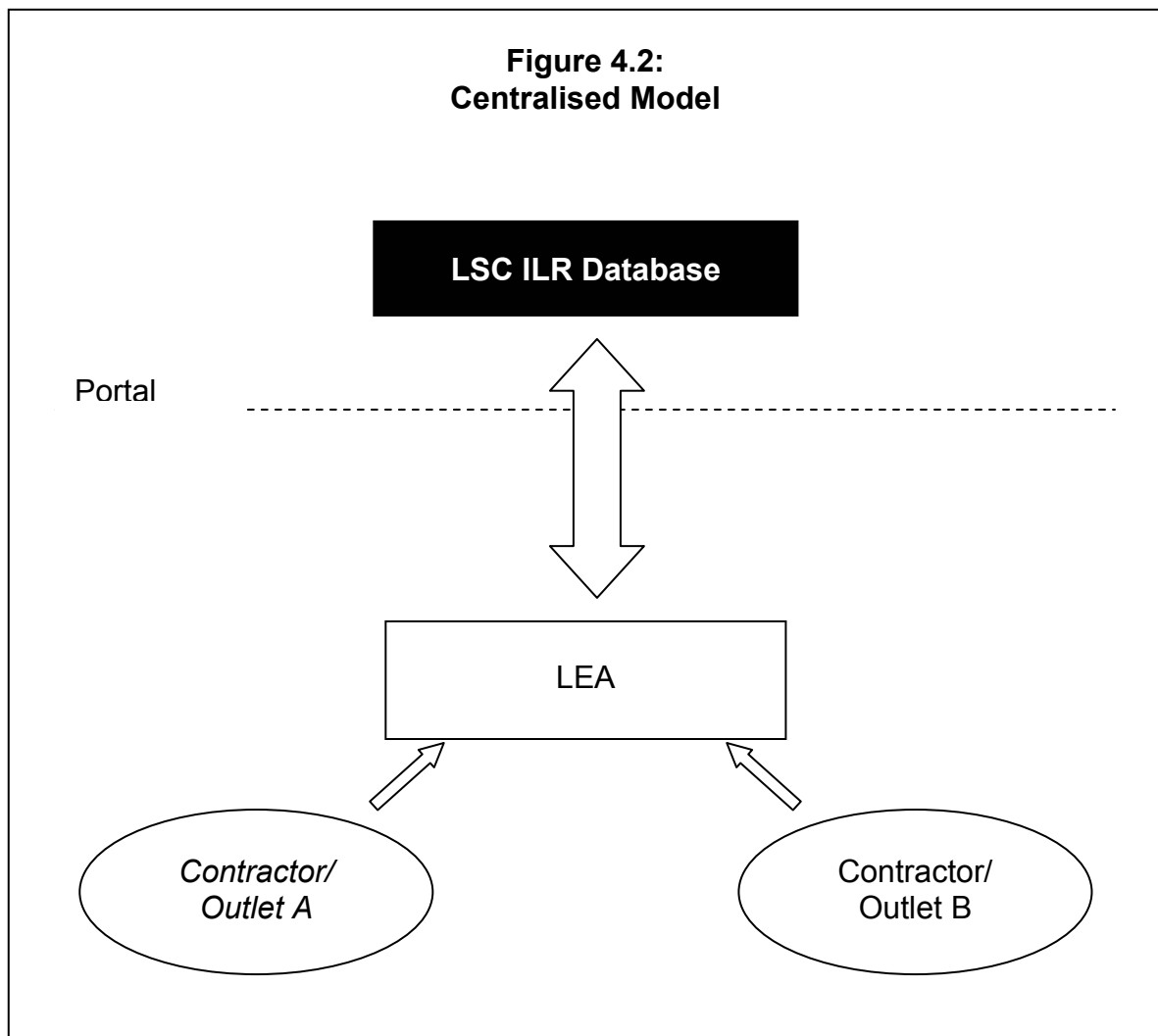
4.15 The disadvantages to this model relate mainly to resource and compatibility issues.

4.16 While LEAs who currently provide ISR returns have functioning databases capable of storing this type of information, there will be considerable set up costs for LEAs who currently contract out ACL. Our estimates based on the survey work undertaken with LEAs suggest that for an average LEA, with 11,000 enrolments/students, the additional per annum costs will be around £50,000.   In addition, there are considerable ongoing costs for LEAs operating such databases, through requirements for upgrades, staff training and new hardware, which would be minimised through the direct model.

4.17 The compatibility of electronic files is another problem mentioned by a number of current ISR-providing LEAs. The collation of database output files from other Institutions is not as simple as is often anticipated and can lead to significant errors within datasets. This will be a particular problem for Contracting Out LEAs working with a number of large FE providers, whose own ISR/ILR systems may be different from the LEA and indeed each other. LEAs will have to accurately specify their exact requirements, a process which could meet with resistance, as it will have resource implications within contracting organisations.

LEA Reactions

4.18 LEAs were asked to express their preferred method of providing information to the LSC in relation to these two models. This analysis is outlined in **Table 4.1**.

Table 4.1: LEA Reactions to the Direct and Centralised Models		
	Direct	**Centralised**
Contracting Out LEAs	10	30
Direct Delivery LEAs	1	33
Mixed Delivery	1	31
	12	**94**

4.19 The Table demonstrates quite clearly LEAs' preference for a centralised model of collection for the ILR. This is most obvious amongst Direct Delivery and Mixed Delivery LEAs, where there is likely to be effective ISR systems already in place that they feel can be expanded to meet the specification of the ILR.

4.20 The situation is slightly less clear-cut in relation to Contracting Out LEAs. While the majority (75%) express a preference for the centralised model, there are a significant number who would opt for a direct entry approach to the web portal. Evidence from the case study work suggests that this pattern reflects a feeling amongst Contracting Out LEAs that they need to establish better ownership of ILR data if the system is to work effectively. However, there are clearly a minority for whom the resource implications of a centralised system are overriding these considerations.

4.21 This analysis from the postal survey is strongly supported by the case study analysis. In **Table 4.2** we outline the preference of each of the case studies and a brief description of their reasoning.

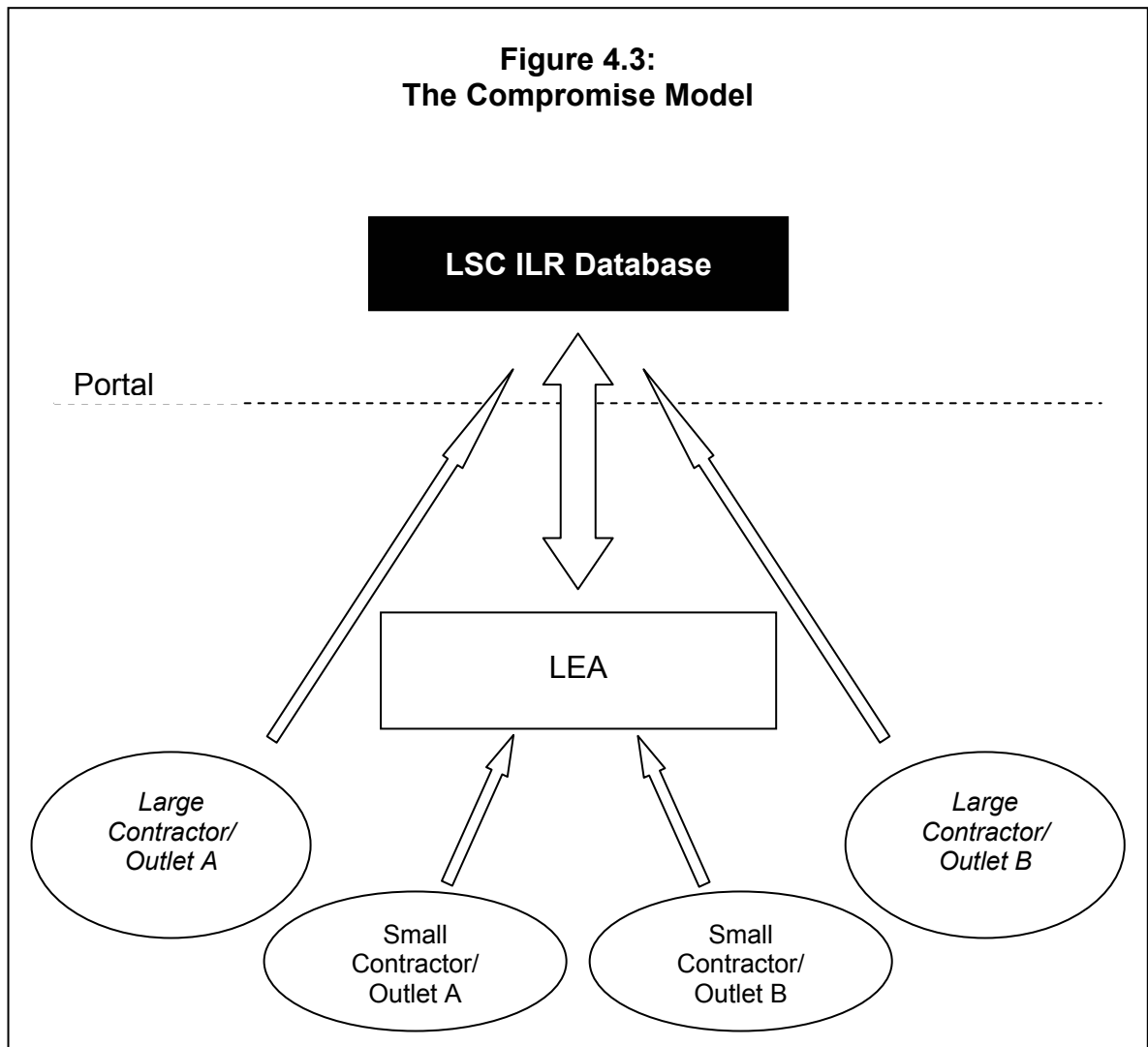|	Model	Reason
Table 4.2: **Case Study Reactions to the Web Portal**		
	Model	**Reason**
DD1	Centralised	Data quality and validation
CO1	Centralised	Ownership and accountability
MD1	Centralised	Ownership, accountability, quality, validation
DD2	Centralised	Data quality and validation
MD2	Centralised	Data quality and validation
MD3	Centralised	Prefer centralised but not keen on web portals generally. Bad previous experiences especially around speed of response. Other concerns around validation and flexibility
DD3	Centralised	See advantage of direct model, but want to see it working
CO2	Centralised	Data quality, validation, ownership, flexibility and reporting
CO3	Centralised	See advantage of direct, but want the control
DD4	Centralised	Can see advantages on both sides, but centralised offers the necessary flexibility
Source: Assessment by YCL Consultants		

4.22 This analysis mirrors the postal survey. The centralised model is preferred by all the LEAs, with data quality and validation being the most often cited reasons for this choice. It is, however, interesting to note that two LEAs did express interest in the direct model and saw the resource advantages, one of which is a current provider of ISR data.

The Compromise Solution

4.23 While the overriding preference is for the centralised model it would seem foolhardy to block off the direct route entirely. A significant proportion of Contracting Out LEAs have expressed a preference for this model and it is this group who face the greatest challenge in meeting the requirements of the ILR. Therefore it would seem sensible, certainly in the early years of ILR, for the LSC to allow both models of operation.

4.24 This compromise principle could also be extended to within individual LEAs. Individual contractors and outlets could make a choice as to whether to provide data directly to the LSC or to the LEA, where an LEA chooses to use the direct model. This would go some way towards helping smaller providers, such as voluntary and community groups, by removing the necessity to interact with the web portal. Returns from the relatively small volumes produced by these groups could be made by paper system and either held in a small database at the LEA or entered directly on to the web portal by LEA staff. This example of how the compromise solution might work is shown in **Figure 4.3**.

Figure 4.3:
The Compromise Model

LSC ILR Database

Portal

LEA

Large Contractor/ Outlet A

Small Contractor/ Outlet A

Small Contractor/ Outlet B

Large Contractor/ Outlet B

5   A SYSTEM REQUIREMENT

Introduction

5.1   In this section we outline the key features of any ILR database system developed by or for LEAs. While one of the key findings of this research must be that the development of ILR systems for LEAs is more about enabling collection and entry through human resource, it remains important to set out the requirements for the IT system that is to lie at the centre.

5.2   This requirement is, at the moment, couched in broad terms and assumes a centralised approach to the web portal; without the final specification for an ACL ILR and the attendant information on the operation of the web portal it would be unwise to attempt any sort of system specification. It is also important not to become too prescriptive. This research has identified a wide variety of ISR systems currently in place, a host of different methodologies for the collection of data and widely different attitudes to the information provided by MIS systems, all of which produce detailed ISR data. The message must be that at the end of the day any system must undertake a number of core functions. If it does these accurately and well, the precise mechanics and specification are not important.

5.3   The system described below sets out these core functions. It should be seen as a base model. Many LEAs providing ISR information at present have systems with considerably wider applications and capabilities; and indeed, many commercially available systems cover a much wider specification, but what is set out below should represent the basic requirements for any system.

5.4   The remainder of this section is structured as follows:

- hardware requirements;
- functionality;
- flexibility;
- validation;
- support;
- costs.

Hardware Requirements

5.5   The examination of LEAs existing systems undertaken as part of the postal survey, identified a modern but not state of the art IT infrastructure within the majority of LEAs, particularly in relation to individual PCs. This suggests that a core requirement for a base system must be the ability to operate on relatively low specification hardware.   This is a requirement driven by pragmatism - small to medium sized LEAs do not need to process and store huge numbers of records and the installation of state of the art PCs and servers is an expense that should avoided if possible. For large LEAs, the systems they require for collection and entry of data may drive the minimum requirements higher, but this is likely to impact more on networking and server technology than individual PCs.

5.6   Connectivity between the LEA central team and its contractors and/or outlets is another key area.   A number of LEAs do operate with networked databases using wide area networks, secure dial-up connections or thin client technology.   However, this must be seen as a step up from base requirements.   At a most basic level, database systems should be able to operate in local outposts by entering information at the place of student enrolment before exporting a compatible file containing batches of records. These files can then be transferred to the central database either via portable storage device or via e-mail.

5.7   It should be noted that a number of LEAs have used this approach in the past with limited success due to data quality problems, and hence there will be considerable training implications for staff in outlying centres.   In truth, although this facility should be a requirement, we would urge LEAs, especially those with little experience in this area, to start off using a simple paper-based collection approach followed by centralised inputting.

5.8   Connection from local centres to the LEA is only one side of the story. LEAs will also need to be able to connect to and interact with the LSC's web portal. The lack of information on a format for the database output files required makes the requirements difficult to identify at present.   However, broadly speaking, there are two scenarios:

- **standard compatible output file** e.g. CSV, ASCII – this scenario is the less hardware intensive. This assumes that the LSC will receive ILR data in a single 'flat'[4] file format, based on a common data transfer standard, such as comma separated values or ASCII. This is the style of transfer used at present for ISR data. The files produced via this method will be relatively small and hence the connection speed to the LSC becomes less important. For an average sized LEA, a 56K modem connection would be a minimum requirement, but in reality a broadband connection would be more sensible, particularly in relation to the stability of data transfer;

- **database file** e.g. XML, SQL – the other option has implications for connection speed and stability. If the LSC decides to require full database files[5] to be uploaded, then the file sizes and consequently transfer times are likely to greatly increase. In this case a broadband connection, with its faster data transfer speeds and greater stability, becomes the only viable option.

Functionality

5.9 Any database system must be simple to use. The skills of individual operators is an issue within some LEAs, in terms of both general IT skills and knowledge of making ILR type returns.

5.10 This implies that the system must operate in a windows-style environment, which will be familiar to most operators, data entry must be form-driven and it must have excellent field descriptions and help functions. This should assist in ensuring data quality.

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[4] This means that the relational element of the database will be removed, so all information can be held in a single file.

[5] Rather than compressing the ILR information into a single 'flat' file, the database would output the contents of the tables within itself relevant to the ILR return into what would effectively be a new database.

5.11 At the opposite end of the process are the reporting functions for the database. If LEAs are to collect all this data they must be able to make effective use of it. A system should provide a variety of built in reports, such as analyses of enrolments at individual outlets/centres or enrolments by postcode, but it should also provide the option to build user specific queries and reports. This should be facilitated through a user friendly front end, such as those used by Microsoft Access, Discoverer or Crystal Reports, which removes the need for a knowledge of SQL (the option to use SQL should, however, remain).

Flexibility

5.12 There are two key areas to the flexibility of these systems:

- the first is the **collection of area-specific information**. A number of LEAs expressed concern about whether 'off-the-shelf' systems would be able to store all the information that they are interested in collecting. This is a problem that is likely to grow, as Contracting Out and previously less proactive LEAs begin to see the value of the data they are collecting they are likely to want to collect information specific to their areas. Any system must be capable of adjusting to these needs if they are to be of use to LEAs;

- there is a need for the systems to be **compatible with other databases** likely to be found in the local learning environment. This is perhaps best illustrated in the case of Contracting Out LEAs. If the LEA is contracting with large local providers they are going to have to be able to import data from these providers. These will, more than likely, provide their data from their own ISR/ILR systems and it is unlikely that these will be the same system used by the LEA. In other words, the database system must be sufficiently flexible to import data from a variety of other systems. This type of compatibility is also important in the development of such labour saving tools as postcode completion.

Validation

5.13 Amongst current ISR providers, validation is perhaps the number one source of problems. The switch to ILR systems is an ideal opportunity to address this problem in both existing systems as they are reengineered and in new systems as they are developed.

5.14 Validation needs to be addressed at two levels within the system. Firstly, there needs to be checks at point of input to ensure that only valid and correctly specified data can be entered into the database, but this must also include extensive help functions and support to allow users to identify errors at this stage. Secondly, the database must also be capable of running validation routines to identify problems such as duplicate records or inconsistent entries. It is in this area that the LSC has a key role in making available technical information on the validation checks that it will be using centrally to enable these to be incorporated into system designs.

Support

5.15 It became very clear early on in this study that the simple provision of software is not sufficient. LEAs will require support to set up ILR systems and ongoing support to ensure that they continue to function properly. There is a key role here for software suppliers, both in-house and consultancies, to provide a holistic service to LEAs.

5.16 Any supplier of ILR systems should at a minimum be providing the following:

- **support for the development of administration and business processes** – it is not enough to simply provide software to LEAs, many will require support on issues such as the most appropriate data collection and inputting models, on changing organisational cultures, and advice on any IT infrastructure issues;

- **training** – LEAs will need initial training on setting up the system, inputting data and also on upgrades. It might also be helpful for suppliers to provide a 'hand holding' service in the early days after implementation;

- **troubleshooting validation and data problems** – as has been discussed before, one of the key problems for current ISR providers, which will not go away with the advent of ILR, is the need for operators that understand the funding process. This is an area where software vendors should be able to provide advice from their experience of working with other LEAs and with ISR/ILR. They should provide support in dealing with validation and data problems;

- **troubleshooting technical problems** – many LEAs will need on-going support with technical issues. Any software provider needs to be able to provide expert technical support for their systems.

5.17 The importance of the support element of the ILR system cannot be underestimated. The switch to ILR data will be a major challenge for many LEAs; they will need a lot of assistance.

Costs

5.18 This does not revolve so much around being the cheapest solution, but around being the most appropriate for the LEA and its needs. Some may require systems similar to those used by FE Colleges, which provide high levels of integration and in which ISR information is just a component part. Others may simply want, or can only afford, a method to make an ILR return. Software vendors need to understand this situation and should be encouraged to develop systems in a modular fashion. This will allow LEAs to mix and match and buy the elements of these wider systems that they require.

6   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

6.1   There are a number of key conclusions to be made from the study:

1.   the readiness of LEAs to provide ILR information to the LSC strongly reflects their previous experience in relation to management information, usually stemming from their existing delivery model;

2.   the analysis of the e-cultures of LEAs seems to suggest that IT capacity and general willingness to integrate the ILR does exist within the majority of LEAs. This is also reflected by the level of enquiries received by York Consulting since the LEA survey was sent out and the large number of LEAs who have volunteered to be involved in any LSC piloting process;

3.   existing systems within Direct and Mixed Deliverers are almost exclusively database-based and, while adaptation will still be a challenge and could potentially involve extra resource, they should provide a basis for an ILR system. The same cannot be said of Contracting Out Institutions, where paper-based and spreadsheet systems are predominant. Many will face considerable resource challenges and will need effective guidance on system development;

4.   while around 60% of LEAs are actively planning for the switch to ILR, few have as yet allocated a budget and a significant proportion appear to be 'sitting and waiting' to see what develops. This inactivity seems to largely stem from a lack of information about the LSC's plans and thinking;

5.   confidence that ILR systems can be built within the required timescales is reasonably high amongst Direct and Mixed Delivery LEAs, but a significant proportion of Contracting Out LEAs seem pessimistic about their chances of success;

6. both the postal survey and the case study work present a clear preference for a LEA-centric approach to working with the LSC's web portal. This is strongest amongst Direct and Mixed Delivery LEAs, but can also be seen amongst Contracting Out LEAs. The primary reason behind this choice seems to be around data quality issues. LEAs are very concerned that validation processes are undertaken at local level before the data becomes too far removed from the original provider;

7. the development of a single national solution for LEAs is not a viable option. The majority of existing ISR providers would strongly resist any attempt to replace their existing embedded system, as implementation of a new system would incur a whole new set of costs. It would also be extremely difficult to provide a single piece of software incorporating sufficient flexibility to meet all needs;

8. a large number of LEAs have expressed concern regarding the impact of the collection of ILR type data on areas of ACL such as basic skills, threshold learning and taster courses. There is a feeling that the collection of this level of information is likely to act as a barrier to learners taking part in these areas;

9. an overall assessment of LEAs readiness to provide ILR data must be that the situation is not impossible and that the majority are capable and have the will to make the switch. However, they will need considerable support, including in many cases additional funding. Particular focus must be placed on the development of business and administrative systems required to collect individualised data. This is the area that concerns LEAs more than the pure IT issue.

Recommendations

6.2 We make the following recommendations in relation to the further development of LEAs' ability to provide ILR data:

1. the DfES and the LSC must avoid being too prescriptive in relation to LEAs' individual processes for providing ILR. Many LEAs have been providing ISR information for years and have systems they are confident can be developed and others have already invested resources in new systems. Where this is the case, LEAs should be allowed to build on this existing base;

2.   conversely to the above, where LEAs at present have either non-viable, outdated or no systems the DfES and LSC should seek to provide necessary support in making a choice. The DfES and LSC should seek to identify a number of 'kite-marked' software providers for LEAs to work with. This list should be based on development partners that are capable of demonstrating suitable experience and technical knowledge. In particular, emphasis should be put on their ability to provide support to LEAs in the initial set-up of systems, including business processes, and in an ongoing capacity;

3.   DfES and LSC should seek to identify sources of funding to assist in the development of the MI systems necessary for the provision of ILR. The outlay for some LEAs in the initial phases of ILR implementation is likely to be considerable and in many cases may not be affordable within existing budgets. This funding should be distributed on a basis of need, which could be demonstrated through development plans submitted by LEAs. This funding should also be made available retrospectively to cover costs incurred for LEAs who are in the more advanced stages of planning;

4.   the LSC needs to provide LEAs with more information on the development of the ILR. At present the lack of communication and news from the LSC is acting as a brake on LEAs in taking action to develop ILR systems. The priorities for the LSC must be the definition of the ILR for ACL and to identify, in conjunction with Xansa, the specifications for the new web portal, followed by their dissemination;

5.   the LSC also needs to provide more information to both existing and potential developers of ILR systems. The lead times on the development of such software can be considerable and these software houses will be key to the successful implementation of ILR. The establishment of a developers group involving the 'kite-marked' providers, LEAs seeking to develop systems in house, Xansa and the LSC would be a useful way of moving forward;

6.   the LSC needs to examine closely the collection of information from learners undertaking ACL in areas such as: basic skills, threshold and taster courses. The level of information required by ILR could have a potentially adverse effect on participation in these areas. It may be necessary to identify a series of core fields, such as name and date of birth, that provide basic information but fall short of an ILR;

7. existing ISR-providing LEAs have a considerable base of experience and good practice that needs to be transferred to other LEAs to enable the transition to ILR. The development of local networks or 'buddying' arrangements, perhaps facilitated by Local LSCs, would provide a useful forum for taking this forward.

Annex A:
Organisations Consulted

Annex A

Organisations Consulted

Case Study LEAs

Camden
Leeds
Manchester
North Tyneside
North Yorkshire
Plymouth
Surrey
Wakefield
West Sussex
Worcestershire

Software Vendors

Active Data Systems
Aqua (Birmingham City Council)
Fretwell Downing Education
Learn for Life