

MOVE TO REDUCE MI BURDEN WITHIN THE POST 16 EDUCATION AND SKILLS SECTOR GATHERS MOMENTUM

In June last year the Management Information (MI) Across Partners Group, a partner group of over 17 key agencies within the post 16 education and skills sector, chaired by the DfES, commissioned a study into the mapping of current education and learning management information requirements. The overall aim of the project was to map out the current collections and information flows between partner groups and identify opportunities for streamlining the collections. The DMC team was awarded the contract. Their full report can be viewed at www.dfes.gov.uk/learningandskills/index.shtml. In summary here is what they found

BACKGROUND

There are two opposing forces at work within the sector. Firstly there is the drive to measure and improve performance which requires an increase in Management Information (MI) and secondly there is the requirement to reduce the bureaucracy and

costs of accountability.

The DMC team showed how this could be done through improved data sharing.

THE MAPPING OF MI WITHIN THE SECTOR

From discussions with the partner group and a number of

selected colleges and other institutions the consultants charted three main reasons for obtaining data from institutions:

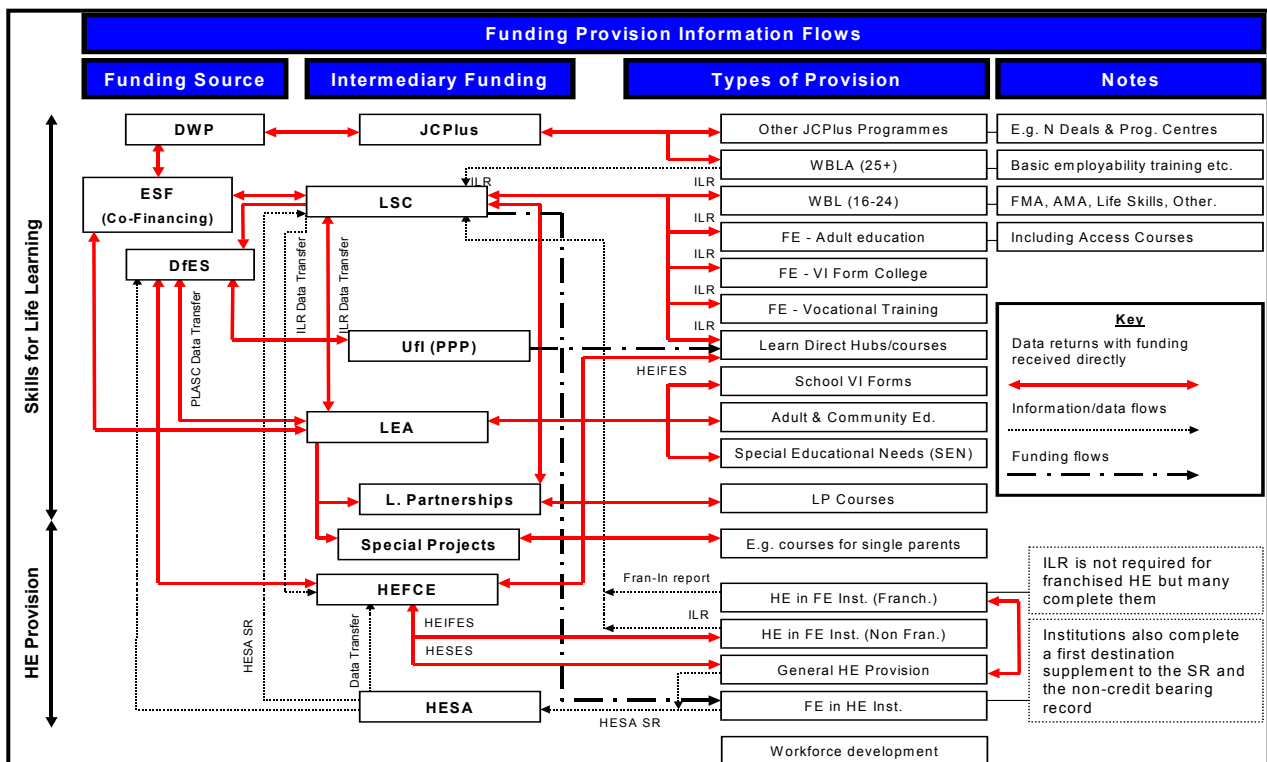
- Data returns for the distribution of funding (Fig. 1 below)
- Data returns for quality assurance

- Data returns for learner assessment

Inter partner information sharing was also charted.

Figure 1 illustrates the complexity of the sector, the breadth of provision and the plethora of funding streams.

Figure 1 – Funding provision information flows within Tertiary Education



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The charts enabled the consultants to gain a full picture of the information flows within the sector and their inter relations. There are several primary data collections and many examples of good practice of data sharing by sector Agencies. The project identified areas where the collection of data from institutions could be improved or streamlined.

Proposed actions resulting from the findings were divided into two groups. Firstly for small projects or ones that could be implemented relatively quickly responsibility was assigned to the individual agency to undertake and report back to the partner group.

Larger more complex projects were classified as longer term and responsibility was assigned to the partner group, as chaired by the DfES.

Short to medium term projects were assigned to amongst others the ALI, the HEFCE, the HESA, The LSC and Jobcentre Plus. Further details on the projects recommended to be undertaken by these organisations can be found within the report.

On the inspection front significant headway was made in bringing the inspection burden to the attention of the partner group. The findings show how the burden of the variety of inspections on institutions from a number of bodies at several times in the year has an effect on operations. The recommendations on this issue in Annex D of the White Paper presented by Charles Clarke MP to Parliament, "The Future

Figure 2 – Longer-term projects recommended for organisations with direct interests in Tertiary Education

FEASIBILITY OF A DATA WAREHOUSE

This project would examine the options and feasibility of combining the main post 16 education and training databases into one data warehouse. This would probably involve populating a new database/data warehouse from current collections rather than trying to integrate existing collections into one.

ASSESSMENT OF NEW AND EXISTING COLLECTIONS

This would assess the options for implementing a mechanism to ensure the effectiveness of any existing and new data collections.

UNIQUE LEARNER NUMBER (ULN)

Building on the consultative work already undertaken with partner organisations and providers, this would examine the feasibility of introducing a common and unique numbering system for learners (particularly focused on costs and savings and the individual benefits to learners), providers and subject codes. Although due to the privacy issues surrounding the learner, the ULN aspects might be better as a stand-alone project.

STUDENT TRACKING

This project would consider the feasibility of creating a national tracking system for individuals in the Connexions client group of 14 to 19 years olds.

DATA DEFINITIONS

This would examine the structures and mechanisms for creating a common library of data definitions that could be shared between partners and providers to ensure the consistency of data.

ACHIEVEMENT ELECTRONIC DATA INTERCHANGE

This project would cover a more efficient mechanism for entering candidates for assessment and reporting back the results.

of Higher Education" echo some of these findings. Figure 2 above outlines six longer-term projects proposed to reduce burden and improve data sharing.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the report were presented to the partner group in November 2002 and to key staff within the DfES soon after.

Following these presentations the report summary was submitted by the DfES for ministerial review and is currently published on the DfES web site.

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NEXT ISSUE

BUSINESS PROCESS REVIEW EXPLAINED – "common pitfalls and how to ensure that potential benefits are realised"

Used correctly Business Process Review projects can be an extremely effective tool for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of an organisation. On the other hand should the BPR approach not achieve its potential a significant waste of valuable resources can leave more questions to be answered than in the first instance.