

# Newsletter

May 2009



## Message from the ISB Chairman Dorian Bradley

Some of you, I know, were able to attend the ISB's Stakeholder event held on the 6<sup>th</sup> April. If you weren't able to get there, you will find more details on the event itself in the body of the newsletter. However, since the event I've been reflecting on the two conclusions that made the greatest impact on me:

- First, from the enthusiastic contribution of those that attended, it is more clear to me than ever before that improved data sharing and interoperability remains a key concern for our stakeholders
- Secondly the ISB's work to address these issues, through data and information standards, is widely supported by our stakeholders and has the full backing of our two sponsoring departments, DIUS and DCSF

I am taking account of these conclusions and the fuller feedback from the event in my work with the ISB members, ISB Secretariat and Technical Support Service as we determine our activities for 2009-10 and beyond.

I am also pleased to report that since the last newsletter we have approved more information standards. To help the 'front line' get the maximum benefit as quickly as possible, we are currently drawing up plans to help stakeholders adopt and embed those standards that have already been approved, like XCRI. As ever, our aim is to improve outcomes for children and learners through better quality information.

I look forward to updating you again in the summer.

'Dorian Bradley independent chair of the ISB'



## ISB Stakeholder Event on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2009

The ISB hosted an event at the BERR Conference Centre, London for its senior stakeholders, and for decision makers and influencers in Education Skills and Children's Services (ESCS) sector. David Bell (the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Permanent Secretary) and Tim Wright (DCSF Chief Information Officer) addressed the event and both gave an insight into the importance of secure information sharing across ESCS and more widely across government. David also relayed the best wishes and continuing support of Ian Watmore, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Universities, Skills and Innovation (DIUS), who was unable to attend due to pressure of work resulting from his appointment to a new post.

One of the main objectives of the event was to get stakeholder input into how the ISB could increase its effectiveness in 2009-10. From facilitated table discussion the following themes emerged:



## Stakeholder Engagement

The ISB should increase its engagement with stakeholders during 2009-10.

Specifically this should included:

- o Greater engagement with suppliers, including providers of management information systems and awarding bodies
- o Greater transparency of the standards at the various stages of the approval process, this ranges from those under consideration to those that are approved for adoption
- o Early involvement of the ISB in projects and programmes so that when standards are developed by one sector, they can applied to other parts of the ESCS system

## Adoption & Embedding

The ISB should increase its focus on embedding standards that have been approved. This should be achieved through a mixture of:

- o Exerting greater authority in mandating standards for the system
- o Persuading stakeholders to adopt standards by demonstrating their value

## Scope

The ISB should continue to forge links with the devolved UK Nations and identify where standards can be shared.

## Event Documents

We are pleased to provide links to the following documents that supported the event:

- o The slideshow presentation [www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/ISB-Stakeholder-Event-Slides-6th-April-2009](http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/ISB-Stakeholder-Event-Slides-6th-April-2009)
- o A summary of the information strategy for ESCS [www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/ESCS-System-Information-Strategy-2009](http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/ESCS-System-Information-Strategy-2009)

## Annual Report 2008-09

As part of the ISB stakeholder event the ISB also launched its Annual Report.

Copies can be downloaded using the following link to the ISB website

<http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/Annual-Report-2008-09>.

## ISB Delivery Plan 2009-10

We are pleased to announce that since our last newsletter, the ISB Delivery Plan 2009-10 has been agreed and published. The Delivery Plan sets out the work programme of the Information Standards Board (ISB) in 2009-10 and includes:

- Details of our stakeholder engagement activities
- Details of our business lead standards portfolio

The Delivery Plan can be found on the ISB website and can be downloaded via the following link [www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/ISB-Delivery-Plan-2009-10](http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/ISB-Delivery-Plan-2009-10) .



## Content Packaging

The e-Learning and Content Packaging Special Interest Group is leading a project (funded by Becta) to support content and service providers in developing an appropriate application profile for content packaging. A content package is a file containing content and metadata and is a way of describing learning content that can be read by many programs.

It has become apparent that there is an increasingly urgent need for educational content and learning platform services providers to agree upon interoperability specifications. There has already been much investment in the investigation and development of technical standards and it is in the interests of all stakeholders to reach agreement on this so that focus can be shifted more towards investment in innovation towards improved content quality to meet the needs of users.

More details on this work can be found on the ISB website and can be downloaded via the following link: [www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/Content-Packaging-Profile-work-update](http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/Content-Packaging-Profile-work-update).

## XCRI Adoption

In January 2009, the ISB approved the Exchanging Course Related Information (XCRI). For more information see link [www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/Newsletter-February-2009](http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/news/news/Newsletter-February-2009).

The focus for the ISB Portfolio, Learning Opportunities, Transcripts (PLOT) Special Interest Group (SIG) has therefore moved to getting the standard adopted. This will build on the experience of two pilot XCRI implementations, managed by JISC, in Greater Manchester and the East Midlands where XCRI has been used to transfer 14-19 prospectus information.

The SIG is currently developing an adoption plan so that course brokers and learning providers can start to realise the benefits of the standard, including estimated financial benefits of £6m per annum. You can view details of this standard and download the specification via our website by following this link [www.escs-isb.org.uk/standardslibrary/XCRI](http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/standardslibrary/XCRI)

## Learner Record

As reported in [February's newsletter](#), the ISB has approved a policy aim of convergence on a single electronic standard for communicating transcripts of learner achievement.

Although the full scope of this work is yet to be defined, the PLOT SIG has already prioritised this as an important area for ESCS. The aim is to agree a standard for learner achievement, which fulfils the requirements of the MIAP Learner Record, the Burgess HEAR and the CEN work on electronic documents for the Bologna process. At the same time, ADD, Portfolios, SIF and Awarding Body standards may overlap this work.

The ISB will aim to coordinate these initiatives so that one standard is developed once to meet all these requirements.

### Next Steps

The PLOT SIG has organised a meeting with representatives from key organisations in June. If you would like more information please email [itgovernance.secretariat@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:itgovernance.secretariat@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk) with your request.

## Ethnicity Standard Approved

We are delighted to announce that the ISB has approved a new Ethnicity Standard for ESCS with a status of Adopted. The development of this standard was funded by *The information authority*. You can view details of this standard from our website by following this link: [www.escs-isb.org.uk/standardslibrary/Ethnicity](http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/standardslibrary/Ethnicity)

Previously, there were too many ethnicity code sets and controlled lists in use across ESCS. Although [Aligned Data Definitions \(ADD\)](#) defined ethnicity, it included four different code sets and none of them were identical to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) ethnicity codes.

The ISB saw it as important, from a standards and a data sharing perspective that all parts of the ESCS move towards the same standard codes for ethnicity. This would avoid confusion, maximise the ease with which data can be interchanged, and minimise changes in the future.

The ISB agreed that whatever ethnicity categories were to be used across ESCS, it must be possible to aggregate them to the ONS short list of codes in order to preserve the important capability to compare statistics against the national population distribution. The ISB also wished to define ethnicity in such a way as to be “future-proofed” against changes in national reporting requirements.

Control of the standard now lies with the ESCS ISB Data Management SIG who will also manage minor updates to the standard where stakeholders need to extend the detailed categories in any area.

If you want to contact the ESCS ISB Data Management SIG or would like to obtain a copy of the standard, please email [itgovernance.secretariat@dcf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:itgovernance.secretariat@dcf.gsi.gov.uk)

## CBDS Standard ‘Inherited’

At the ISB meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> May, board members agreed to accept CBDS (Common Basic Data Set) with the status of Inherited. You can view details of this standard and download the specification via our website by following this link <http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/standardslibrary/CBDS>

### What is CBDS?

Currently CBDS provides a standard for data used in school, education authority, the DCSF and other software systems for management information. It encourages suppliers to use the same definitions so that data can be transferred from one system to another (Primary->secondary). Four specifications have been developed, covering: pupils, adults (teachers, support staff, governors), schools and LEAs.

### What is the purpose of this acceptance?

The purpose of ISB’s acceptance of this inherited standard is first, to acknowledge the importance and current use of CBDS, but secondly, to alert new projects to the fact that CBDS (in its entirety) is **not** seen as the strategic direction of travel for future standardisation. Over time, the ISB expects to approve a series of discrete standards for data items, each of which will, as far as is feasible, be suitable for use across all relevant parts of ESCS. Although many of those will be based on the definitions currently within CBDS, some will not. We encourage all new projects to take this into account.

## Change request process for 2010/11 ILR now open

The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) is a collection of data about learners and their learning that is requested from learning providers in the Further Education (FE) sector by the Information Authority (the I.A.). The data collected is used by organisations in the FE sector to ensure that public money is being spent in line with government targets for quality and value-for-money, for future planning, and to make the case for the sector in seeking further funding.

The process for requesting changes to the 2010/11 individualised learner record (ILR) is now underway and key documents are available to download from the I.A. website at: <http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/RequestforChange/>.

Any requests for change need to be submitted before 26<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

Later in the year, learning providers and stakeholders will be encouraged to share their comments on the proposed changes. More information on this process and how you can get involved will follow.

Paul Kelman, Stakeholder Engagement Manager for the I.A., said: "My advice to anyone thinking about requesting a change to the ILR is to talk to us as early as possible. We're always keen to hear ways of reducing complexity, so let us know if there are any low value fields that you think could be removed altogether."

The full timetable for developing and publishing the 2010/11 ILR specification can be found at <http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/RequestforChange/201011timetable/>.

## Special Interest Group Updates

The ISB Special Interest Groups continue to be the main interface between the ISB and the ESCS businesses. To re-cap on updates in previous news letters the five existing SIGs include: Data Management, Vocabularies, Identity Management, e-Learning and Content Packaging and Portfolios, Learning Opportunities and Transcripts.

All of the SIGs have dates have expected meeting dates planned for the remainder of 2009. If you are interested in getting involved in any of the SIGs, please email [itgovernance.secretariat@dcf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:itgovernance.secretariat@dcf.gsi.gov.uk) with your request.

## ISB Contact Details

If you would like to provide feedback on the newsletter please contact us on [itgovernance.secretariat@dcf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:itgovernance.secretariat@dcf.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.escs-isb.org.uk](http://www.escs-isb.org.uk)

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