**Minutes of the Software Development Forum meeting**

**1 July 2013**

**Brunel House, Cardiff**

**Present:**

Ceri Davies (CD) Cardiff/ SIMS user group

Kenny Barker (KB) Advanced Learning

Tony Selby (TS) RM

Mike Jones (MJ) Swansea/ ONE user group

Glyn Thomas (GT) Cardiff/ ONE user group

Jim Haywood (JH) Capita

Caryl Harding (CHa) Capita

Sam Hooker (SHo) Capita

Phil Jones (PJ) Capita

Claire Horton (CHo) WG

Jenna Arnold (JA) WG

Lindsay Lewis (LL) WG

Steve Hughes (SHu) WG

Alison Sharp (AS) WG

Tom Hume (TH) WG

Arfon Owen (AO) WG

Andy Milne (AM) WG- **P.M.**

Anthony Jordan (AJ) WG- **P.M.**

Mike Madigan (MM) WG- **A.M.**

Geoff Hicks (GH) WG- **A.M.**

**1. Apologies and introductions**

Eileen Baxandall Wrexham/ SIMS user group

LL welcomed all to the meeting, introduced the new members to the group and thanked representatives for taking the time to attend.

**2. Minutes and actions of meeting on February 18th 2013, matters arising**

The group agreed that the minutes were a true record of the previous meeting. LL then went through the outstanding actions list.

Action 55: LL explained that this is still open and that a rule will be written shortly.

Action 57: PJ raised an issue on exclusions in EOTAS, specifically on the provision of hours from multiple sources. CHo confirmed that there is no expectation that exclusions will form part of the EOTAS collection yet as it is important to ensure the data the WG gets from PLASC is right before possibility of extending to the EOTAS collection can be explored. It was noted that there can be many issues with reporting from the variety of EOTAS level provision. It was also confirmed that LA collections for exclusions include PRUs.

Action 1: SHu explained that the contract for aggregating exam results has been awarded to a new contractor (Fischer Family Trust) and that WG would see if the process could be made easier for schools by using reports in DEWi. It was noted that nothing was needed by suppliers as the future format was still in discussion, and it was agreed that the action point could be removed.

Action 41: the Hwb presentation has been uploaded to DEWi, with paper copies distributed at the meeting.

**3. Middle Schools, PRUs and Special Schools- Use of MIS**

CHo asked suppliers whether MIS could be used by middle schools, PRUs and special schools for returning NDC data, and noted that it would be ideal for the use of contingency spreadsheets to be eliminated.

JH explained that PRUs were on the school census in England last year and that their lookup tables needed adjusting. Additionally, some PRUs didn’t register themselves as PRUs, but any issues were averted by using establishment numbers. He added that patches could be sent as necessary for any emerging issues.

JH advised that PRUs previously had a dedicated census but are now part of the main English census and that many PRUs also considered themselves too small to use MIS. MJ and CD confirmed however that the PRUs in their respective LAs do use MIS.

CHo noted that WG are not at a stage to specify the use of MIS by PRUs for PLASC next year, but that work is being carried out to ensure PRUs can use DEWi as expected.

JH asked if anything new was needed to modify the specification to add PRUs - CHo said that it be would researched. JH confirmed that there were many dual registration issues for PRUs. He also asked if each specification could make reference to how middle schools, special schools and PRUs should be incorporated. This was agreed.

**Action: WG to research what changes would be necessary in adding PRUs to the specification for NDC**

**Action: WG to incorporate middle schools, special schools and PRUs into future specifications where applicable**

**4. Post-16 Collection: Future Plans**

LL welcomed GH to introduce plans for future post-16 collections.

GH explained that the old NPFS was based on activities, which allowed all providers to maximise funding by qualification loading. Therefore a programme approach is now preferred, focussing on outcomes.

In November 2013 schools will be asked to plan programme delivery for the 2014/15 academic year, with a simple return on a spreadsheet of the number of learners on programmes. In March 2014, schools will then be asked for an update, again on a spreadsheet. In November 2014, schools will be asked to analyse their progress in comparison to their original planned programme for 2014/15, comparing plans with performance, and also to provide their 2015/16 plans.

In March 2015 schools will be asked for an updated plan for 2015/16, and for their progress in comparison to their 2014/15 plan.

GH acknowledged that learners will leave between the two collections, and re-iterated therefore that the collection would be about recognising patterns rather than following individual outcomes.

Then in July 2015 a full electronic data will be required from schools. This will be on an individual learner basis and will need to detail the learner’s programme as well as activities and any changes to it during the year. This should bring parity between schools and colleges as previously both were measured using different methodology, and will allow for easier comparison. He reiterated that there were no plans to reintroduce the two old PLASC collections that were removed.

TS asked if there would be three returns of data, GH answered that the November and March returns would be basic summary returns, and it is not expected that these will be provided by MIS.

MJ enquired if the Post-16 collection would go ahead in 2013. GH replied that this was currently being reviewed with those in WG who use the data. MJ noted that Swansea find the collection useful and use it locally. He also confirmed that three or four Local Authorities replicate the current Post-16 funding system.

JH asked if the July return would be programme or activity-based, and added that programmes as a concept would have to be introduced and therefore early notification would be helpful. GH replied that there would be a large number of programmes for colleges, but a much smaller number for schools. GH would identify coding for 30 programmes. The headcount of learners on each programme would be the priority. It was added that WG was being firm on funding requirements. The web link to the programme directory was handed out (<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/p16planningandfunding/planningandfundingreview/post-16-planning-and-funding-events>).

GH added that validation was not envisaged at the beginning of the new collections and that it appeared that if the November collection was approved then the current September collection would be phased out. JH mentioned that they would probably want to modify the structure of the existing collection and so would need to know if both collections were taking place.

GH mentioned that the FE Policy Team would give the School Information and Improvement Branch (SIIB) a specification and would be happy to share codes for funded programmes when they are introduced. JH mentioned that in their experience spreadsheets are more difficult to administer as schools often ask for assistance and that xml is usually easier for all concerned. GH replied that spreadsheets would have to be used initially, but will consider options for the medium term. He also confirmed that that the collection wouldn’t include special schools in the first instance.

AO asked if it was possible for programmes to be derived from the combinations of subjects selected for the learner. GH advised that this was the case but that WG wish the programme to be selected to reinforce the notion of a programme approach to learning.

JH, talking about learners dropping out or changing courses, advised that other collections such as for HE have a minimum qualification period of six weeks before data for subject or programme choices needs to be returned. GH replied that he would check with the Qualifications team to seek advice.

JH asked if suppliers could know the plans by the end of the week after the meeting (w/c 8th July).

**Action: GH to check qualifications period with Qualifications Team**

**Action: WG to report Post-16 Collection plans to suppliers by 12th July**

**5. NDC 2014**

LL welcomed AJ to the meeting who proceeded to explain the National Tests, adding that the WG has a contract to provide three more years of tests.

AJ remarked that the change of Minister could mean a change in priorities, but hoped that the new Minister would commit to the test as a cornerstone of raising standards. There was pressure within the sector to move to online testing, but this raised concerns that younger learners may not regard tests as important if they were taken online - although this might change in the future with familiarity.

LL highlighted that next year Numeracy Tests would run alongside Reading Tests. MJ asked if there would be one set of standardised scores for the Numeracy Tests. AJ replied that one set was considered, but concerns were raised that amalgamated scores would mask problems and therefore it was decided to have separate standardised scores - one for each Procedural and Reasoning Numeracy Tests.

AM suggested that if the tests were taken online, it may be easier to identify specific issues, for example if a class all failed on the same question. AJ answered that was a positive aspect, but there were currently barriers to online testing.

*NDC Specification*

AS then presented the specification for 2014 and ran through the changes.

She reiterated that there was one file for all tests, and that next year the file will include progress score difference - for Reading Tests and for the Procedural part of the Numeracy Test, but not for the Reasoning part of the Numeracy Test as it will be sat in 2014 for the first time.

MJ stated that it would preferable to have the import file returned to LAs and not just to schools.

AS mentioned that this year, schools have been required to re-import the import files when they submitted a new NRT file, and that this would also be required next year. LL noted that this wasn’t stipulated in the specification and so will need to be included in the next draft.

TS asked if the file would have a framework like the CTF. AS replied that the files follow the partial CTF format and that WNT will be used as the file name for the import files. Reading Test items have been included in the CTF13 specification and Numeracy Test items will follow in the CTF14 specification.

AS mentioned that if a school changes a pupil’s raw score from a value above 1 or D or X to a 0 (zero), then the standardised and progress scores for that pupil will not be over-written in the new import file. The specification will provide details of when data should be replaced on re-import.

It was specified that currently acceptable raw score codes and ranges are 0-99, X and D in A\_COMP. The exact numerical range however has not yet been confirmed but it will be included in validation. AJ confirmed that NfER would be consulted and would feedback to the group on the exact numerical range, but this may not be possible until September 2013. Suppliers confirmed that this was acceptable but their preference is to have it early enough to incorporate the exact range in on-entry validation in systems.

**Action: WG to specify what should happen in the import file where pupils’ raw score change to 0**

**Action: AJ to check date when raw score range will be available and feedback to the group via CHo**

**Action: Validation to include exact numerical range of raw scores after consulting NfER**

AS mentioned that a new code might be needed for scenarios where a raw score, X or D do not apply - and this would be specified in due course.

AJ confirmed that there has been a higher level of disapplication than for teacher assessments. Different schools have different disapplication policies, and the rules on disapplication were being reviewed.

AS explained that only one result for each of the Numeracy Tests (Reasoning and Procedural) is required for submission in NDC, and it is up to schools if they want this to be the Welsh or English test. Only one, however, can be sat in the test window. The test window period currently stands at two weeks, but this is still to be decided for 2014 and could be changed to a shorter period. This will be included in validation.

TS asked if suppliers should allow provision for the entry of one set of tests. AJ replied that schools might wish to record both Welsh and English results (if they have been sat) for their records, but for only one to be returned as part of NDC.

It was confirmed that only the first Reasoning and Procedural test sat should be uploaded, provided it was sat within the test window. AJ noted that the administration of the tests is being reviewed. Schools may not receive the tests in advance and therefore there will be less chance for schools to administer the test before the window.

CHo confirmed that it would not be appropriate to remove the option for schools to choose which test paper was sat on the mark sheet on MIS. This is because, in the case of Numeracy Tests, they can choose between and English and a Welsh version of the test. While it does not matter statistically which test they do, it is data that needed to be returned as part of NDC.

TS asked if the progress score difference could be calculated in MIS. CHo replied that the progress score difference couldn’t be calculated until an import file was received. It would be easier to keep the calculation in DEWi and return all the data a single import file.

It was confirmed that the key dates in the specification are provisional, and some minor issues that needed changing were highlighted.

MJ raised an issue with duplicate assessment regarding data being uploaded to DEWi not being imported and giving a schema error. CHo replied that this was a software issue that had been reported a few times and that Conwy had a fix for this issue that was shared amongst the user group.

*A\_COMP*

A\_COMP 2014 was discussed briefly. AS explained the \* and \*\* codes and confirmed that \* would be reported to parents in the individual pupil reports as ‘score is below the range’ and that \*\* would be reported to as ‘score is above the range’ as opposed to being returned as a code.

**6. SDF Cycle**

Due to the extra work needed for NDC this year, it was explained that some other projects have been delayed, such as the January PLASC and EOTAS draft file set release. CHo advised that testing for these would be carried out in the next few weeks. JH mentioned that it would be useful to receive early versions of draft file sets. It was agreed that this could be considered.

**Action: WG to release PLASC & EOTAS 2014 draft filesets by end of July 2013**

**7. Any Other Business**

**7.1** MJ raised a query on secondary attendance where DEWi is checking that “sessions possible is in the range 60 - 400”. It seems to occur where there are a large proportion of late starters. LL confirmed that this would be looked into to see whether the rule needs to take account of the start date.

**Action: WG to research “sessions possible in the range 60 - 400” validation rule**

**7.2** MJ raised a query that one of Swansea’s PRUs cannot produce an NDC KS3 file as the file also requires KS4 pupils. It was confirmed that they could use contingency spreadsheets for the time being. LL stated that validation rules would need to be reviewed if PRUs are to be included in future returns or alternatively that all schools/PRUS define the age groups that they cover.

**7.3** CHo raised an issue regarding how fixed-term exclusions are calculated in MIS, with a discrepancy between exclusions in PLASC and those in the LA data collections. She suggested that this may be caused by weekends being included in exclusions that span over two consecutive weeks. MJ suggested that the fact that exclusions were optional in PLASC could explain the discrepancy, and JH offered that the data would be more accurate when they are mandatory. LL requested suppliers to provide feedback on the issue.

**7.4** CHo confirmed that special schools will not be included in the Attendance collection for 2014. It was agreed to send any guidance to LAs as well as schools as requested by GT.

**Action: Suppliers to provide a paragraph on how fixed-term exclusions are calculated in their systems to WG**

**Action: SH/MS to provide PLASC data to Cardiff and Swansea to investigate discrepancies on the calculation of fixed-term exclusions**

**Action: WG to copy LAs into special schools’ Attendance emails**

**10. Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 9th October in Conference Room 2, Cathays Park, Cardiff.