

WARWICK INSTITUTE *for*
EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH



**Ufl learndirect:
Enhancement of the
National Resource Service**

**Local Labour Market Information (LLMI):
Feasibility Study**

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Contents

	Page
Executive summary	i
Recommendations	iv
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Available LMI: National Guidance Research Forum website	3
2 Existing local labour market information	6
2.1 Existing LLMI: an overview	6
2.2 Aspirational attributes of local labour market data sources	8
2.3 Health warnings and statistical reliability of data	11
2.4 Geographical disaggregation	14
2.5 Signposting to local area data and profiles	14
3 Assessment of online vacancy sources and local information	20
3.1 Sources and nature of vacancy information	20
3.2 Consultation on the vacancy data and sources used by Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships	27
3.3 Key issues in collecting vacancies information and LMI	33
4 Review and evaluation of occupational information	34
4.1 Comparative review of selected occupational information	34
4.2 Evaluation of occupational information resources	42
4.3 Gaps in provision that exists for written resources on occupations	44
5. Presentational style of Local Labour Market Information	46
5.1 Overview of online local labour market information	46
5.2 Review of selected local labour market information online	47
5.3 Consultation on the presentational style of labour market information	49
5.4 Template for presenting online LLMI – construction of a new resource	61
5.5 Summary of issues for presenting LMI	64
6. Case Study: Worktrain	66
6.1 Background to Worktrain	66
6.2 Worktrain development	66
6.3 Assessment of the Worktrain website and retrieval of information	68
6.4 Additional problems in making links between vacancies and training opportunities	72

6.5	Worktrain maintenance activities	72
6.6	General health warning	73
6.7	Evaluation of Worktrain	74
6.8	Worktrain development and maintenance costs	76
7.	Technical support required to facilitate knowledge creation	77
7.1	The need for a shared online knowledge base and discussion forum	77
7.2	Knowledge development and combination processes in action: the example of the National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) website	78
7.3	Development of a shared online knowledge base	79
7.4	Collaborative development processes: stimulating online discussions	80
7.5	Lessons learned from the development of the NGRF website	82
7.6	Summary: reflections on creating and supporting a computer-supported collaborative environment	85
8	Conclusions	86
Appendices		
1	Attribute list	91
2	Questionnaire for IAGPs on vacancy data and sources	93

Executive summary

- 1) Extensive consultations with the practitioner community have emphasised the **crucial importance of high quality, reliable labour market information (LMI)** for effective advice and guidance.
- 2) Whilst existing provision offers rich sources of LMI for this purpose, it has shortcomings. In particular, there are gaps regarding information at regional and (more particularly) at sub-regional level. Provision of these data would create a far more comprehensive LMI coverage to support further the work of advisers. A major finding from this study is that, however desirable, **it would not be feasible to include all existing local labour market information (LLMI) sources in one on-line LLMI facility** because of their dynamism, number and range.
- 3) Regarding the **updating of LLMI data sources** which may be brought together for use by advice and guidance practitioners, **it is not possible to make a universal recommendation**, because different data sources are updated at different times,. Equally, it is **unwise to apply a universal rule** about whether information of a certain vintage is **reliable or useful** because of variations by source and topic.
- 4) Likewise, **it is not possible to make a universal recommendation about geographical disaggregation of data sources**, due to differences in statistical robustness and reliability between sources. As a general rule, maximum spatial disaggregation in data collection allows re-aggregation to a range of other geographical units. In practice, most advice and guidance practitioners are dealing with administrative units (or aggregations thereof) – e.g. local authorities, local LSC areas, etc., but these may not necessarily be the most relevant geographical units for all purposes.
- 5) As many IAG Partnerships do not directly collect vacancy information, but rely more on available local information and knowledge, **collation of a comprehensive list of sources** (both online and in hard copy) is necessary.
- 6) **Operational difficulties** that need to be addressed before local information could be linked to a national database include IT compatibility and resources.

- 7) **Key issues for the collection of vacancy information and LMI** at regional and sub-regional levels include: resources (time and staffing); accessibility of information and ease of use; sharing information more widely with partners; and short-term funding (which mitigates against developing longer term initiatives).
- 8) **Occupational information that is available online is reasonably comprehensive.** The coverage of the occupations is increasing as more Sector Skills Councils develop this type of information. However, much of the occupational information that is available details the current labour market situation and is retrospective. More forward looking occupational information and forecasts are required.
- 9) Whilst the type of occupational information examined from selected sources was found to be similar, **the detail and type of information is varied.** Additionally, the online presentation of the information is varied and the availability of occupational information as downloadable and printable pdf documents is limited.
- 10) A **combination of occupational data, including** factual information, retrospective and future trends information is required not only to meet the needs of practitioners and clients, but more importantly to produce a truly comprehensive source of information.
- 11) There is **little agreement within the broad advice and guidance community** about what LLMI would be most useful and necessary for effective practice. Different stakeholders (e.g. practitioners, managers, trainers) require different types of information for different purposes (e.g. employment trends and projections, unemployment trends, skills gaps, earnings or salary levels).
- 12) This complexity is exacerbated by the **varied needs of customers**, who require different types of LMI (and LLMI) at different stages of their career development and who vary considerably in their ability to understand its implications for their own particular circumstances.
- 13) The LLMI that is available online is reasonably comprehensive but is sometimes **not easy to find.** There is currently no common formatting or presentation style.

- 14) Worktrain provides a **relevant case study** of some of the **issues involved in providing a national resource** which collates and uses data on vacancies, training course and occupations. Key issues include the efficient use of resources by adopting a partnership approach; accessibility and varied sources of data.

- 15) The National Guidance Research Forum website provides a well-developed section on national LMI trends. It also offers a technological methodology for providing **continuing professional development** for practitioners in the effective use of LLMI in advice and guidance, based on the concept of knowledge creation. Specifically, it offers the facility for the sharing of good practice, identify emerging labour market issues; and working collaboratively (e.g. on case studies).

Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to different sections of this report. Some are achievable within a short to medium-term time scale and require modest resources. Others may be regarded as longer-term and aspirational, requiring significant resources. These recommendations are presented to stimulate discussion and debate about directions and priorities for future action.

Existing Local Labour Market Information (LLMI)

- **links to** area profiles available on Nomis and Neighbourhood Statistics should be utilised to provide contextual information;
- **training** should be provided to ensure practitioners are aware of the provenance of information that they are using (i.e. where has it come from, how was it collected, etc);
- **guidelines** should be developed to support and encourage practitioners both to look more widely than local authority/unitary authority level (at broader sub-regions and regions) and to focus down at micro area levels (especially for certain disadvantaged groups) to get a more rounded picture;
- **mechanisms** should be put in place (e.g. regular employer contacts and report writing) to enable the networking and partnership working that will allow information to be gleaned at local and sub-regional level about ongoing and likely future developments impacting on the local labour market;
- **training materials** should be produced to help practitioners examine projections/labour market trends at sub-regional, regional and (for more detailed disaggregations by sector and occupation) at national levels. (For other sources, levels of geographical disaggregation vary according to data collection methodology).

Online vacancy sources and local information

- **Existing vacancy and local information should be linked to a relevant website** (like the National Resource Service or the National Guidance Research Forum).
When compiling these sources, they need to:
 - be evaluated in terms of data collection, coverage, reliability, robustness, frequency of collection and usability;
 - be reliable, current and up-dated regularly;
 - be clearly categorised (by, for instance, geography, sector, occupation, and target group) to enable efficient searching;

- include a brief description and search terms to enable users to determine the relevance and usefulness of information;
 - include online resources and links, together with information on trade journals and associations; and
 - use limited 'clicks' to required vacancy search engine (pertinent for those users without a fast internet connection).
- **Users should be able to add and share their own resources** in order to build a comprehensive and useful resource. When linking information and sources, only robust websites with clear sustainability should be used as links become out-of-date very quickly and will require constant checking and updating. However, this study has identified several issues relevant to this process including:
 - evaluating sources of vacancy information is difficult. Few websites state where and how the information is obtained, how often the vacancy information is collected, the frequency at which information is updated, the coverage of information and whether the listings are verified;
 - compiling information and vacancy data used by advisers would be time-consuming. Sources used reflect their personal preferences and requirements;
 - using existing online sources would be an extensive exercise – online sources of vacancy information are plentiful, but LLMI dates quickly so there would need to be a reliance on practitioners sharing their knowledge and sources of information.
 - further investigation of those vacancy websites that are sector specific, but not linked to or supported by Sector Skills Councils, to determine credibility.

Occupational information

- **An online resource of occupational information should be developed** which can be used by advisers to research any occupations that may not be available elsewhere. This study reviewed selected occupational information and found the following types of information are missing or limited:
 - career routes and pathways highlighting opportunities for progression;
 - typical employers;
 - case studies;
 - related occupations;
 - main occupations of graduates in a particular sector; plus
 - sources and links to vacancy websites and information.

- As well as current data, **occupational information should contain future trends and projections** relating to:
 - job openings and locations;
 - future employment levels;
 - occupational drivers of change;
 - replacement demand;
 - future skill and qualification requirements;
 - future skill gaps and shortages; and
 - occupational demand.

- **Occupational information should meet minimum quality standards.** Specifically, it should be:
 - available online as well as available as a downloadable and printable document;
 - structured into clear sections and navigable online;
 - a combination of key messages, text (both factual and interpretative) and charts;
 - accessible (i.e. clear language and jargon free);
 - both retrospective and looking forward as well as including current information; and
 - informative, highlighting further sources of information.

Presentational style of LLMI

- The **template for presenting online LLMI**, developed from this study, should be adopted in the development of any new LLMI resources (see page 63).

The National Guidance Research Forum website

- **A high level of synergy should be managed between the National Resource Service and the National Guidance Research Forum websites** to rationalise LMI provision for the advice and guidance community of practice and maximize the potential for added value from resources funded from the public purse.

- **A section dedicated to continuing professional development** for practitioners in LLMI, **should be resourced**, building on the lessons learned so far. This would use the technology from the NGRF designed to support the processes of knowledge creation. The type of technical support required to facilitate knowledge creation through online discussion that are compatible with and integrate working with the

NGRF website is based on a process that takes approximately 6 months and includes the:

- organisation and management of 2/3 face-to-face events to initiate discussions and to complement the technical support;
- creation of an integral technical and editorial support;
- appointment of animators to initiate, develop and promote discussion threads;
- link to existing material on the NGRF website;
- use of enhanced discussion forums (i.e. web-blog) that allow users to not only upload a comment or question, but to add documents, links and pictures;
- construction of a good search engine;
- structuring of knowledge that is useful; and
- development of new discussion threads to branch out from original discussions and topics by users.

1. Introduction

This feasibility study examines key issues relevant to the development of an on-line local labour market information (LLMI) facility for the Ufi learndirect National Resource Service (NRS). Its objectives are to:

- examine the viability of developing a customised, on-line option relating to local labour market information, which responds to the specific needs of Ufi learndirect and its customer/client base;
- assess the extent to which a degree of synergy and alignment can be achieved by making a strategic link between the National Research Service (NRS) and the National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) websites, in a way that adds value to the existing LMI Future Trends section of the NGRF website.

1.1 Background

Feedback from NRS practitioner consultations commissioned by Ufi learndirect in May 2004 provides a clear indication of areas for development for the NRS, with the need for high quality, accessible labour market information (LMI) emerging as one strong theme. One of the conclusions from this consultation¹ was that there is a **scarcity of LMI** in a format that is suitable for use with clients:

whilst there was plenty of LMI data available, little of it was seen to be in a format that was digestible for advisers and clients

ASW (2004) Appendix 5, p. 39

A specific need identified by the consultative process related to the need for **improved LMI**, specifically:

local, sub-regional, regional; adult entry to careers; major employers in different sectors, company size, services provided, qualifications/skills required.

ASW (2004) Appendix 5, p. 37

Additionally, a number of the participants in the consultation process suggested that a **tiered system of LMI** should be developed:

¹ ASW Consulting Services (2004) Scoping the National Resource Services, Report July 2004.

with a national overview of sectors and occupations, but with a facility for regions to add regional themes and for local IAGPs to insert local data.

ASW (2004) Appendix 5, p. 39

Since this consultation was completed, a major LMI resource has become available for the guidance practitioner community through the launch (in September, 2004) of the National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) website². One substantial section of this website is entitled: 'LMI Future Trends'. Its target audiences, however, comprise guidance practitioners, managers and information specialists, rather than clients. To be rendered meaningful to most clients, the information requires expert mediation by guidance practitioners.

Thirty occupational sectors are currently available. The structure and content of this section of the NGRF has been informed by user feedback (see section 1.2 below) collected over a period of approximately five years (see section 1.2 below). Additionally, Sector Skills Councils have been invited to undertake a critical review of the final version of material for their sector. Each sector on the NGRF currently comprises ten areas, together with a summary sheet that gives a broad overview. The ten areas are:

- **key points** – important facts about the sector acting as a lead in to the content;
- **sector information** – sector profile, employment trends and forecasts, skill needs, gaps and shortages, hard-to-fill vacancies, replacement demands;
- **data and charts** – links to all the tables and charts;
- **regional dimension** – information on regional trends and differences;
- **occupations** – occupational forecasts, shares, trends and changes together with regional differences;
- **equal opportunity issues** – gender, disability, age, ethnicity, religion/belief, sexual orientation;
- **education and training** – training and educational programmes, qualification level of workforce, apprenticeship data, vocational information, destinations of graduates;
- **research** – a list of recent research about the sector;
- **discussion points** – thought-provoking questions to encourage online discussions;
- **links and sources** – a list of the sources used in compiling the sector including links to the documents where possible, links to other sources of information, useful websites and links to careers information for practitioners.

² National Guidance Research Forum website: <http://www.guidance-research.org>

Whilst this source of LMI is, therefore, of a high quality, comprehensive and of direct relevance to needs articulated by the practitioner community, its particular emphasis is on national trends and projections, with only one of the areas examining labour market trends at the regional level. Even within this area, the regional aspect is limited - partly because of financial resources available to develop this part of the website and partly because of the information sources from which it was drawn (that is, regional sources that are sector specific are somewhat limited and include, where available, data from specific regional reports, regional observatories and Sector Skills Council reports. Consequently, data available on the website are confined to current national and regional portraits).

Details of what LMI, exactly, practitioners said they need to work effectively with their clients is examined in more depth in the next section.

1.2 Available LMI: National Guidance Research Forum website

The development of 'LMI Future Trends' on the NGRF website was informed by several iterations of evaluation within the guidance community. Overall, this has involved approximately 300 practitioners, managers, trainers, researchers and policy makers in various consultations about the types and form of LMI needed to support the work of practitioners with their clients. From three distinct phases of consultation, a clear consensus has emerged around the crucial importance of comprehensive, high quality LMI to effective advice and guidance. A summary of what LMI practitioners regard as essential, useful and desirable follows.

LMI identified by practitioners as **essential** included:

- local information and trends;
- equal opportunities issues;
- regional data and trends;
- self-employment trends;
- detailed occupational information (including career paths, entry point and salaries);
- qualification level of the sector's workforce;
- current developments in education and training;
- types of employers in the sector (such as number of SMEs);
- vacancies information; and
- destination of graduates with sector specific degrees.

LMI judged **useful** by practitioners:

- up-to-date local data (vacancies, training opportunities, salary levels);
- trends related to skills, organisational change and labour market restructuring;
- client-centred, accessible materials;
- specific, sector-based examples (e.g. particular career paths);
- information that can be printed out and given to clients;
- information on skill mis-matches;
- information on how skills transfer between contexts; and
- information available via the internet.

LMI practitioners would **most like** to have:

- LMI specifically targeted at adults;
- information about 'new' job titles, skill levels, career paths³;
- information that helps clients think about the future and jobs available (such as applicant/entrant ratios and information about the types of employers offering particular types of employment);
- information with an equal opportunities dimension;
- information on salary levels (continually up-dated) for different occupations;
- fact sheets on particular areas;
- samples of job descriptions at different entry points; and
- simple summaries of government employment initiatives.

Given the resources available for the LMI section of the NGRF website, it was not possible to address all practitioner requirements. In particular, attempts to research current and reliable local labour market information were abandoned because of sustainability issues, as well as any attempts to gather information that dates rapidly (like information on salary levels). Trials of LMI materials were then conducted with practitioners over a period of about a year and feedback on a) type; and b) format of the LMI was gathered. In summary, practitioners emphasised the need for LMI to be:

- available on an easy-access basis;
- detailed and specialist (e.g. local vacancy information; skills forecasting, occupational trends and probabilities, regional trends);
- well structured and professionally presented;
- constantly updated;

³ It should be noted that there is always (and will be) a delay in standard statistical sources attending to 'new' developments, such as job titles.

- comprehensive;
- collated and distilled from varied sources;
- connected and linked to other sources; and
- descriptive and graphical (using simple language and statistical analyses).

Further consultations confirmed these findings and several points were added:

- data should not be more than 2/3 years old;
- a summary page was needed which could be printed; and that
- language should be simplified wherever possible.

The structure and content of the 'LMI Future Trends' section of the NGRF website has, therefore, been informed at all stages of development by needs identified by the practitioner community. Whilst it addresses many of the substantial LMI issues identified by the consultation undertaken by Ufi learndirect, it does not attend to concerns relating to sub-regional, local labour market information (LLMI).

This report examines, therefore, the feasibility of extending the national LMI currently available through the NGRF to LMI at a more local level, presented in the structure and format indicated by various practitioner consultations. Specifically, it identifies the attributes of reliable data (section 2); makes an assessment of available online vacancy sources and information (section 3); critically reviews current provision of occupational information (section 4); presents a template suitable for presenting LLMI (section 5); considers broad issues related to sustainability of an LLMI resource for guidance (section 6); and finally reviews the implications of providing technical support for a section dedicated to the professional development of practitioners relating to the use of LMI through making available a discussion area that facilitates knowledge creation (section 7).

2. Existing local labour market information

This section provides an introduction to sources of local labour market information (LLMI) and issues that users should keep in mind. In particular, it focuses on the main attributes that should be used in an assessment of specific data sources. It also highlights those issues – couched in terms of ‘health warnings’ – that the practitioner community should be aware of when using LLMI. Exemplars of specific LLMI can be found in subsequent chapters; hence the focus here is on what might be termed ‘foundation’ issues.

Aims of this section:

- to provide an introduction to sources of LLMI;
- to introduce key LLMI sources – especially information systems/services which may be used in ‘links’/‘signposting’;
- to outline issues in assessing the statistical reliability and robustness of LLMI (including the development of the attribute list);
- to make recommendations about the updateability of LLMI; and
- to make recommendations about the geographical disaggregation of LLMI.

2.1 Existing LLMI: an overview

Existing sources provide different types of LLMI. For example, ‘Working Futures’⁴ (disaggregated to local Learning and Skills Council areas in England) provides information on broad historical trends and projections by occupation and industry, by drawing on data from the Labour Force Survey and the Census of Population to feed into a macroeconomic model.

Foremost amongst the information systems providing access to a range of source data is Nomis. For analysts who want to have access to source data there are facilities to extract the source data at <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>. However, it is clear from practitioner feedback (see section 3, below) that many may not have the time (and often the knowledge or expertise) to undertake such analysis themselves. Rather they are reliant on others to convert source information into pre-packaged intelligence.

⁴ It is expected that Working Futures 2 as an information source will be available from autumn, 2005.

Hence, it is pertinent to note that Nomis has recently introduced a facility for access to automatically constructed 'Labour Market Profiles'⁵ for local authority and unitary authority areas and wards. Sources included cover:

- trends in unemployment;
- more detailed information on industrial structure and size bands⁶;
- Jobcentre Plus vacancies⁷;
- average earnings in a particular area and contextual information (e.g. demographic information on ethnic group composition and age profiles, information on qualification profiles, and percentages involved in training).

Links are provided for users to access the source data themselves if they wish to do so.

A second key repository of local data is Neighbourhood Statistics.⁸, where the information complements that on Nomis. Of particular interest are the 'Neighbourhood Profiles'⁹ (again wards and for local authority and unitary authority areas) which are organised under a number of general headings. Those likely to be of greatest relevance are:

- 'Deprivation' (providing easy access to Indices of Deprivation scores);
- 'Economic activity';
- 'Students, education';
- 'skills and training'; and
- 'People and society'.

⁵ For an example for Coventry see:

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431966/report.aspx?town=coventry>

⁶ From the Annual Business Inquiry.

⁷ Note that these are a subset of all vacancies in a local area, since they comprise only those vacancies notified by employers to Jobcentre Plus, the Public Employment Service for Great Britain. The data are sourced from Jobcentre Plus' Labour Market System, an administrative computer system covering 100% of vacancies notified to Jobcentre Plus. It should be noted that in recent years there have been changes to Jobcentre Plus procedures for taking and handling vacancies. The figures are not fully comparable over time and may not indicate developments in the labour market. For further details see Bentley R. (2005) 'Publication of Jobcentre Plus vacancy statistics', *Labour Market Trends*, June, 253-9.

⁸ Both Nomis and Neighbourhood Statistics come under the auspices of the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

⁹ See <http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/AreaProfile1.do?tab=1> for the example of Wainbody ward in Coventry.

In the 'Profiles' section, information is presented in text and graphical form, with 'benchmark' comparators (local/unitary authority and district in the case of ward level profiles) to set information on the area in question in a broader context.

The Nomis and Neighbourhood Statistics profiles are updated as and when new information becomes available. It should be noted here that different information sources become available for updating at different intervals; so it is not appropriate to set a universal update frequency for all information sources.

As detailed in section 5, below, regional and local observatories are useful sources of LMI at regional and local levels.¹⁰ It is important to note that the services of observatories differ between areas and there are not local observatories in all areas. Nevertheless, they do represent a useful source of LLMI with 'value added'. Hence, it is worthwhile for advice and guidance practitioners to be aware of what is available in their own local area. Likewise, local LSC staff and local Council economic development unit staff are likely to have reports and analyses of interest.

Yet other sources of existing LLMI include media reports and networking relationships with local partners involved in training, economic development and advice and guidance activities. The local press is a particularly useful source of new openings, etc.

2.2 Aspirational attributes of local labour market data sources

Because of the number and range of existing LLMI available sources indicated above, it would not be possible to include them all in one on-line local labour market information (LLMI) facility. This study is concerned, therefore, with identifying and assessing the feasibility of developing an on-line LLMI facility for key sources.

Ideally, details of the key sources should be presented and assessed according to a common format, as outlined in the table below, providing details of:

- introduction to the data set and topic coverage;
- availability and access;

¹⁰ An example of a local observatory is the Lincolnshire Research Observatory. Amongst the sources which can be accessed via the website (see Chapter 5 for details of the website) is a Census Atlas, including a section on 'Working and the Workforce' which includes information on economic activity at district level, knowledge intensity and sectoral structure of employment, economic sub-areas within the county, age profile of the workforce by sector, occupational profiles and skills and qualifications of the workforce.

- geographical coverage and spatial disaggregation;
- other disaggregations;
- data collection/generation methodology;
- updating; and
- assessment and future prospects.

Codes	Attribute	Details required
A	Introduction to data set and topic coverage	
A1	Data set	Name and brief description
A2	Ownership	Who owns the data? Provide contact details if possible
A3	Type of data	Survey (employer, individual, household)/census/administrative data, etc)
A4	Topic	Subject(s) covered – e.g. vacancies, employment structure
B	Availability and access	
B1	General/ restricted access	Is the whole of the data set general access? Are some parts restricted access? If so, which parts? Are there restrictions on sharing data?
B2	Data set access	Provide details of electronic links to data set
B3	Availability of meta data	Provide details of electronic links to meta data and paper publications
B4	Costs	Are there costs incurred in accessing/using/sharing data? If so, provide details
C	Geographical coverage and spatial disaggregation	
C1	Coverage	e.g. England, GB, UK, a specific region, etc
C2	Standard/non-standard spatial disaggregations	e.g. Region, local authority, town name, etc
C3	Maximum spatial disaggregation	What is the finest level at which data are available?
D	Other disaggregations	
D1	Disaggregations available	Age/gender/industry/occupation/subject of study
D2	Details of classification schema used	What is key here is to note whether a standard classification schema is used (e.g. SIC for industry, SOC for occupation) and what non-standard breakdowns are used (e.g. age groups)

E		Data collection/generation methodology	
	E1	Who is responsible for collecting/generating data ¹¹	Name of organisation (e.g. ONS, private company, etc)
	E2	Purposes of data collection and target users	Distinguishing primary and secondary purposes as appropriate, and identifying target users
	E3	Description of data collection/generation methodology	Description of data collection methodology – including details of sampling frame, sample selection, etc, as appropriate
	E4	Sources of further information	Links to other sources of information about the data set and about how it has been used
	E5	Assessment of robustness and reliability of the data set	This should include details of quality assurance procedures, views on coverage at local level, etc
F		Updating	
	F1	Update frequency	How often is data collected/ generated? – e.g. real time, weekly, monthly, annually Provide details of scheduling if data collection/generation is at intervals in excess of 1 month
	F2	Timeliness	Note on when latest data currently available relates to, and elapsed time between data collection/generation and availability
G		Assessment and future prospects	
	G1	Overall assessment of the coverage and usefulness of the data set	
	G2	Health warnings	What are the key issues that users should keep in mind when using the data
	G3	Future developments	Note on any ongoing/future developments regarding the data set

See Appendix 2 for an example of how this information can be used to evaluate a source.

¹¹ This could be different from the 'owner' identified in 'A2'.

2.3 Health warnings and statistical reliability of data

General 'health warnings', applicable across a number of data sources, include:

'Provenance' of data

When considering any data set, it is helpful for any user to keep in mind information on how the data were collected (i.e. methodology) and why it was collected. This will enable an initial assessment as to the likely reliability of the data, and an initial assessment about its robustness. Questions to consider include:

- if the data were collected for a specific reason, what are the implications of the rationale of data collection for the coverage and reliability of the data set?
- what are the implications of the data collection methodology for the coverage/degree of detail available in the data set?
- what period does the data relate to?
- if the information is not current, but is being used as a proxy for the prevailing situation, is there any reason to expect that there have been substantial changes in the period since data collection?

In general, if the provenance of data cannot be established clearly (in terms of sourcing and timing) it is prudent to exercise a degree of caution in interpreting that information and translating it into intelligence.

Classification issues

Various classification systems (both standard and non-standard) are available. Users need to beware that:

- *Standard classification systems* (e.g. Standard Industrial Classification, Standard Occupation Classification) *change over time* to take account of developments in economy and society. (This has implications for analysis of trends.) Some suppliers match 'new' and 'old' classification systems in order to produce consistent classifications/produce data series on a consistent basis. There is a tension between, on the one hand:
 - pressures to resist changes to classification systems, in order to maintain comparability between data sources and over time (so enabling the generation of time series data); and, on the other hand,
 - pressures to update classification systems to better reflect reality, address new 'policy' issues, etc.

- *A category name/label may not necessarily have the same coverage between sources* – but there is a move towards ‘standard’ classifications and ‘harmonisation’ of classification systems (e.g. across the EU). Therefore, it may be appropriate to check the detail of classification systems.

(The issue of the same label encompassing different definitions of the same phenomenon tends to arise in circumstances when a particular issues rises up the policy agenda, and no universal standard is agreed or adopted – examples include definitions of ‘cultural industries’, ‘the knowledge economy’, etc.)

- *Non-standard classification systems* might well seem attractive for a particular purpose, but difficulties arise when a system/facility draws together data sets/information using different scheme, because of a lack of comparability.

Boundary and ‘geography’ issues

Some of the issues here are similar to those addressed under the ‘classification issues’, immediately above.

- *Boundaries of geographical areas* may change over time. A recent key change was the shift from Standard Statistical Regions to Government Office Regions. Such boundary changes have implications for the generation of time series statistics.
- Some geographical areas are more ‘stable’ than others are.
- At sub-regional level, especially, the same ‘name’ can refer to *different geographical units* – e.g. Cambridge local authority district, Cambridge TTWA, etc. Often, users may bring together data on different topics from a number of sources adopting different geographical units.
- Use of *non-standard geographies* poses a problem for a LLMI facility/system because we cannot be sure of comparability between sources. Also what one person thinks of as ‘area X’ may be different from what another person thinks of as ‘area X’.
- When focusing attention on a particular region or local area, there is often a tendency for information users to ‘treat’ that area as an ‘island’ – cut off from the influence of cross-boundary flows.

Residence- and workplace-basis of information

This links to the issue of cross-boundary flows. It is important to know whether the data from a particular source refers to people living in an area (i.e. a residence base) or people working in an area (a workplace base). Sometimes indicators are compiled using a numerator compiled on one base, and a denominator compiled on the other.

Survey non-response bias

In any data based on a survey it is important to consider the possibility of any potential bias caused by non-response, together with the impact of such non-response for the robustness and quality of the data.

Social surveys often find that the most socially excluded sections of the population do not respond to surveys. So, the people most difficult to survey are those who are difficult to contact at home (because they are out or because they are unwilling to answer the door to strangers) and people who are alienated from the wider society. This is a particular problem, since these are the target groups for many government initiatives aimed at combating social exclusion.

Related to survey non-response bias are further issues of:

- *proxy responses* – In some surveys a member of the household may provide answers on behalf of other members of the household. Users need to bear in mind whether, and to what extent, the use of proxy responses has implications for the quality of the data.
- *recall error* – In some surveys respondents are asked to remember events over a period of time. This introduces the possibility of recall error.

Scope and coverage of administrative data

Often a key advantage of administrative data sets at successively more disaggregated geographical scales is that they provide complete coverage. However, the user needs to bear in mind that administrative data are collected for administrative purposes, and so reference is made to administrative definitions. As administrative definitions change, so does the scope and coverage of administrative data collected. This can create difficulties in generating time series data. Moreover, the effect of changes in scope and coverage of administrative counts can vary at different geographic levels.

Alternative information sources

In order to answer a particular question or examine specific topic of interest, there may be a number of different data sources to which a user can turn for information. While in some instances the sources will 'tell the same story', in other instances the details/trends may be contradictory. This may arise because different methodologies were used to collect information, coverage may vary, the concepts may be defined differently, different classification systems may have been used, the time period to which the information refers may be different, or the appropriateness of the analytical

techniques used in manipulation of data may vary. If ‘the stories are different’ it does not necessarily mean that one source is ‘right’ and the other ‘wrong’, or that one source is ‘better’ than the other is. It may mean that further investigation may be necessary to try and find reasons for the differences.

2.4 Geographical disaggregation

It is not possible to make a universal recommendation about what geographical disaggregation of data sources. The geographical scales at which different sources are available varies. Moreover, the geographical scales at which difference sources are robust varies according to data collection methodology. For example, in the case of surveys, sample size and sampling variability are key issues.¹² In the case of Census information (intended to cover the whole population) or administrative data (where coverage of the population of interest is virtually complete) it may be possible to present disaggregations at the micro area level, subject to confidentiality constraints.¹³

In general, practitioners are dealing with information for local authorities. Hence, at face value, this might appear an appropriate level for geographical disaggregation. However, in geographically small local authorities in large metropolitan areas, it is likely to be useful to look at trends over a much larger area. Conversely, if the concern is with disadvantaged people in disadvantaged areas a micro area level focus is apparent. So, the following general rules apply:

- for projections it is appropriate to focus on the sub-regional or regional level (e.g. groupings of local authorities);
- vacancy information is generally postcoded, so can be accessed by ‘town’/‘area’/distance band; and
- information on deprivation should be disaggregated to micro area level.

2.5 Signposting to local area data and profiles

This section outlines possible links for overviews of local areas. Key websites are Nomis and Neighbourhood Statistics – both are Office of National Statistics websites.

¹² In the case of the Labour Force Survey the Office for National Statistics sets ‘thresholds’ below which data should not be published.

¹³ Such that it should not be possible to identify individuals.

2.5.1 Nomis

Nomis can be accessed at <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>. It provides access to a wide range of LLMI (on employment, unemployment, vacancies [notified to Jobcentre Plus], earnings, demography, etc) for different spatial units. These data provide a valuable source for analysis purposes. However, the emphasis in this section is on access to area profiles.

There is a facility for typing in the name of a place, local authority district or postcode to access a **Labour Market Profile** for a **particular District**, drawing on a variety of data sources, each relating to the most recent time period for which data are available, covering:

- Resident population: total population (mid year estimates)
- Resident population: working age population (mid year estimates)
- Labour supply: economically active (local area labour force survey 2003/4)
- Labour supply: economically inactive (local area labour force survey 2003/4)
- Employment by occupation: 9 SOC Major Groups (local area labour force survey 2003/4)
- Qualifications: 6-fold classification based on NVQs (local area labour force survey 2003/4)
- Earnings by residence: gross weekly pay and gross hourly pay for full-time workers by gender (New Earnings Survey 2003)
- Working age benefits: total JSA claimants (JSA counts and proportions)
- Working age benefits: JSA claimants by age and duration (JSA counts and proportions)
- Labour demand: jobs density (Jobs density 2002 via Nomis)
- Labour demand: employee jobs – broad sector (Annual Business Inquiry)
- Labour demand: earnings by workplace gross weekly pay and gross hourly pay for full-time workers by gender (New Earnings Survey 2003)
- VAT registered businesses (VAT registrations/deregistrations)
- Notes on definitions and explanations

For a specific example obtained by typing in 'Kenilworth' which is in Warwick district see: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431964/report.aspx?town=kenilworth>

For most of these data series there is a facility for 'clicking' to view a *time series* of data.

There is also a facility for accessing a **Ward Labour Market Profile** by typing in a postcode or ward name. For a specific example obtained by typing in L7 9LU to access Kensington ward in Liverpool see:

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/Imp/ward/1308630090/report.aspx?pc=L7%20%209LU>

This covers a reduced set of variables, and relies heavily on the 2001 Census of Population:

- Resident population: total population (2001 Census of Population)
- Resident population: working age population (2001 Census of Population)
- Labour supply: economically active (2001 Census of Population)
- Labour supply: economically inactive (2001 Census of Population)
- Hours worked: disaggregated into full-time and part-time employment by gender (2001 Census of Population)
- Employment by occupation: 9 SOC Major Groups (2001 Census of Population)
- Qualifications: 3-fold classification: no qualifications or level unknown, lower level qualifications, higher level qualifications (2001 Census of Population)
- Working age benefits: total JSA claimants (JSA counts and proportions)
- Working age benefits: JSA claimants by age and duration (JSA counts and proportions)
- Notes on definitions and explanations

2.5.2 Neighbourhood Statistics

At ward level a **Local Area Profile** is also available from **Neighbourhood Statistics**, see, for example:

<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/Default.asp?nsid=false&CE=True&SE=True>

From the outset, the Neighbourhood Statistics area profiles covered a greater range of topics than the area profiles on Nomis (i.e. they are not focused solely on the labour market). However, again the 2001 Census of Population is a key source at this micro area level. Prior to an update of the Neighbourhood Statistics website in April 2005, information was provided as follows:

- People statistics: resident population and age (2001 Census of Population)
- People statistics: marital status (2001 Census of Population)
- People statistics: ethnic group (2001 Census of Population)
- People statistics: religion (2001 Census of Population)

- People statistics: health and provision of care (2001 Census of Population)
- People statistics: economic activity (2001 Census of Population)
- People statistics: students and qualifications (2001 Census of Population)
- Commentary is also provided on key DWP benefits – with statistics
- Housing and households: tenure (2001 Census of Population)
- Housing and households: type of house and price (2001 Census of Population and Land Registry)
- Area statistics: indices of deprivation – rank of district in England, and a paragraph outlining the scope of the Indices of Deprivation
- Area statistics: levels of crime (Home Office)

This profile also gave brief summary details, including guides to where to look in Neighbourhood Statistics for more detailed information.

Following a major update to the Neighbourhood Statistics website in April 2005, it is possible to type in a postcode or area name in order to access a greater range of data on a specific area in an improved Neighbourhood Profile. For example, Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 rankings and facilities for:

- building your own area, such as a 'neighbourhood' or housing estate, from a best-fit of Output Areas – there is a facility to save these areas to re-use or to share with other users;
- selecting variables from a number of different datasets and see them in a single table, making it easier to analyse differences or similarities;
- charting time-series for the first time;
- thematically mapping all datasets and analyse further using new mapping tools; and
- viewing datasets on alternative geographies, with Output and Super Output Areas as the default which are stable over time and allow easier comparison of time series data. Information is also available on a range of other geographies such as wards, health areas, parliamentary constituencies and parishes. Additionally information held on Output and Super Output Areas is being made available against new alternative geographies on a best-fit basis.

2.5.3 Indices of Deprivation

Note that details of the Indices of Deprivation are held on the ***Neighbourhood Statistics*** website:

[http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/datasetList.do?Expand9=1&\\$ph=60&updateRequired=true&step=1&CurrentTreeIndex=-1#9](http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/datasetList.do?Expand9=1&$ph=60&updateRequired=true&step=1&CurrentTreeIndex=-1#9)

From Neighbourhood Statistics there are also links to more detailed information on the Indices of Deprivation at the **ODPM website**, including access to full reports and data at: <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/indices>

For an overview of the Indices of Deprivation and details of the type of information available see:

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=4610&l=3

The Indices of Deprivation measure both multiple deprivation and different domains of deprivation (e.g. income; employment; education, skills and training) at the micro area level.

2.5.4 Working Futures

As noted in 2.1, 'Working Futures' provides information on broad historical trends and projections by occupation and industry, by drawing on data from the Labour Force Survey and the Census of Population to feed into a macroeconomic model. The aim of the Working Futures projections is to provide a range of useful labour market information and intelligence, and to provide a sound statistical foundation for planning of key agencies concerned with skills and the labour market.

Working Futures I reports may be accessed via the SSDA website:

- a Summary Report – <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/PDF/wf-summary.pdf>;
- a National Report – <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/PDF/wf-national.pdf>;
- a Regional Report – <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/PDF/wf-regional.pdf>.

Working Futures provides projections of employment by sector and by occupation over the medium-term (i.e. a period of 10 years from the 'baseline').¹⁴ The projections should be regarded as *indicative*. Breakdowns are also provided by gender and by employment status (distinguishing full-time employees, part-time employees and the self-employed). Additionally, projections of 'replacement demand' are made – showing

¹⁴ For example, from 2002 to 2012.

employment opportunities likely to arise as a result of retirements, occupational mobility, etc.

The Regional Report provides separate chapters on the Government Office Regions in England, and on Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It should be noted that sectoral disaggregations are more limited at the regional than at the national level. Within England, limited statistics are provided on employment for six broad sectors and for nine Standard Occupational Classification Major Groups at local LSC area level.

Working Futures II reports covering the period to 2014 are due to be published in autumn 2005.

In conclusion, this section has provided a brief overview of sources of LLMI relevant to the practitioner community and introduced key LLMI sources. Key issues in assessing the statistical reliability and robustness of LLMI have been outlined and challenges related to the updateability of LLMI considered. The next section assesses online vacancy sources and local information.

3. Assessment of online vacancy sources and local information

This section presents an overview of selected online vacancy information and local information as used by Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Partnerships together with an assessment of the issues for linking to such sources. Online vacancy information and websites are funded and managed by various private and commercial organisations, publicly funded institutions and professional bodies. The review focuses on the development and funding of LMI, the means of searching the information and who it is aimed at. Finally, results from consultations with four IAG Partnerships are reported which informs the recommendations about the sources and nature of vacancy information.

Aims of this section:

- to review selected online vacancy websites;
- to report on the consultations with four IAG Partnerships about local information and vacancies data; and
- to recommend sources of vacancy information and issues for linking information.

3.1 Sources and nature of vacancy information

Vacancy information (especially local vacancies) is a resource that guidance practitioners commonly identify as both invaluable and hard to access. At the local level, this presents a particular challenge for any online resource – particularly comprehensive, up-to-date coverage.

There are many online vacancy websites which are managed variously by the public and private sector. Compiling and linking to these online vacancy websites would require some understanding of what categorisation would be most useful to practitioners. At present, online vacancy websites can be categorised by:

- geography – national or regional (for example, many county councils and regional organisations have local vacancies advertised);
- sector or occupation;
- target group which is based on client attributes such as qualification level, employment status or age group; and
- general – not specific to any region, target group or occupation, but are aimed at all and cover a wide range of occupations across the UK and, in some instances across Europe.

Additionally, some vacancy websites are very general – not specific to a region or local area, target group or occupation. To add to this complexity, online vacancy websites also cross categories. For instance, the Northern Ireland Civil Service recruitment website is both regional and sector specific and the Gradsouthwest vacancy website is aimed at graduates in the South West so is categorise by region and client attribute. Although these varied approaches create some problems, the majority of websites can be categorised by geography, sector or occupation, and client attributes.

The following table reviews and summarises selected online vacancy websites by category (including general, sector specific, target group and regional). Details of each website are presented together with the search facilities and targets. It should be noted that very few of the websites reviewed had clear information on the reliability, robustness, updateability and coverage of the sources of vacancy information. Reviewing and evaluating information is essential in determining the suitability of linking to the website (see section 2.2, above).

Table 3.1 Sources of online vacancy websites

Category	Website	Details	Search by	Aimed at
General	Worktrain http://www.worktrain.gov.uk	Worktrain is part of the Department for Work and Pensions. The Worktrain website provides job, training, learning and career profile searches and related information.	On the Worktrain website you will find: jobs search with Jobcentre Plus, training search with learndirect, career profiles, over 630 descriptions of jobs, search for local childcare, and search for voluntary work. Search for jobs, training, careers, childcare and voluntary work by typing in a question.	Aimed at all.
	Monster http://www.monster.co.uk	Monster.co.uk is the UK arm of Monster, an online recruitment site. Over 35,000 current employment opportunities.	Search vacancies by UK region, sector/occupation, FT/PT/permanent/temporary, employer, and key word. Plus search by Scotland, Europe and Globally.	Aimed at all.
	Fish4 http://fish4.co.uk/jobs/index.jsp	A national vacancy website which has local sites for those searching in specific areas. fish4jobs has a selection of job vacancies throughout Britain and is updated daily. Fish4jobs (and associated websites - fish4cars and fish4homes) has been developed by four regional newspaper groups.	Jobs can be searched by type of job and/or area. A more focused search can also be undertaken using job title, key word, industry sector, location (within so many miles of a city or postcode), working options (i.e. contract, consultancy, flexible hours, full-time, permanent, part-time, shared position, temporary) and salary level.	Aimed at all.
	The Guardian Jobs http://jobs.guardian.co.uk/	The website is part of the Guardian newspapers group.	Users can search by job category in the first instance or by keyword, location, salary and sector using the advanced search.	

Category	Website	Details	Search by	Aimed at
Sector specific	Improve http://www.improveltd.co.uk/	jobs bulletin in development		Aimed at those working in or wishing to work in the food and drink sector.
	Lantra http://www.lantra.co.uk/	very limited vacancies		Aimed at those working in or wishing to work in the environmental and land-based sector.
	Skills for Justice http://www.skillsforjustice.com/	very limited vacancies		Aimed at those working in or wishing to work in the justice sector, including: community justice; custodial care; police; court services; Customs and Excise; law enforcement and prosecution.
	Jobs.ac.uk http://www.jobs.ac.uk	Website created in 1997 by the University of Warwick and 36 other universities. It is now recognised at the HE recruitment website of the UK.	Jobs can be search by job sector, job type and keyword. Jobs can also be searched by specialist area including careers in HE, research council, Scotland and Ireland. A website dedicated to vacancies in research, science, academic and related professions and includes vacancies from universities, colleges, research institutions, public sector bodies, charities and commercial organisations in the UK and abroad.	Aimed at those working or wishing to work in research, science, academic and related professions.
	ClickAJob: recruitment consultants http://www.clickajob.co.uk	A UK based recruitment website advertising vacancies in the UK, predominantly in London and the South East. Vacancies can be searched on the website and over seventy online job boards.	Users can search by location (including distance for a specified location), keyword and job category. In addition to searching for job vacancies, users can also search for companies and agencies by location.	The online recruitment services specialise in: Sales and Marketing jobs; Finance and Accountancy jobs; Office and Secretarial jobs; IT Industry jobs; and Legal Sector jobs.

Category	Website	Details	Search by	Aimed at
Target group	Doctorjob.com http://www.doctorjob.com	comprehensive	Search by area of work, degree course, location and start date.	Aimed at graduates.
	E4S: Employment 4 Students http://www.e4s.co.uk/	The website is divided into three zones aimed at: jobseekers; students; and employers. The jobseekers zone has information on student jobs, summer jobs, part-time work, company reviews and gap year ideas. The student zone is dedicated to student deals, reviews, cheap travel, sports and social events. The employer's zone allows employers to advertise part-time student jobs and temporary work opportunities.	There is a quick search function by region together with an advanced search function. The advanced search function allows users to search by: job type; regional location; work environment (indoors or outdoors); plus start and finishing dates.	Aimed at students looking for summer jobs, holiday jobs and part-time jobs.
	Propsects http://www.prospects.ac.uk/	Established in 1972, CSU (the commercial subsidiary of HECSU) has changed its name to Graduate Prospects. Working in partnership with the official bodies in the field of Higher education, Graduate Prospects brings students, graduates and recruiters together for over 30 years. It has close working relationships with HECSU (the Higher Education Careers Services Unit), AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services), SCOP (the Standing Conference of Principals of Colleges) and Universities UK. It is the UK's official graduate careers support service.	Search vacancies by job category.	Aimed at graduates.

Category	Website	Details	Search by	Aimed at
Regional	East Sussex County Council http://www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk/jobs/	East Sussex County Council vacancy website focuses on the employment opportunities and workplace training opportunities in the county council and partner organisations.	Job vacancies can be search by: all jobs; keyword; department; job title; location; and closing date. The 10 latest job vacancies are listed on the front page.	The website is aimed at those wanting councils jobs in the East Sussex County Council jobs which range from administrative to care workers.
	Careers Northwest http://www.careersnorthwest.com	Careers Northwest aims to focus attention on some of the regions key skills gaps, highlight future employment opportunities and promote the region as a place of opportunity. The website is developed, funded and managed by the Northwest Development Agency in partnership with: Connexions; the IAG Network; Jobcentre Plus; Sector Skills Councils; employers; Trade Unions; Further Education colleges; Higher Education colleges; schools/LEAs; and the Learning and Skills Councils.	Users have to define themselves as in one of three categories in order to start the job search: young person; adult; or graduate. Job vacancies can be search using a keyword, postcode and this distance from specified postcode. Users can starting searching by using the careers directory to find out about a job and then search for it using the same criteria as before.	The website is aimed at young people, graduates and adults.
	Gumtree.com http://www.gumtree.com/	An online community which was started in London in March 2000 designed to connect people who were either planning to move, or had just arrived in the city, and needed help getting started with accommodation, employment and social opportunities. Other Gumtree websites are available in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, Poland, Canada, Dubai, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.	Employment vacancies can be searched by a predefined set of occupations and broad categories.	Aimed at those living in the specific Gumtree location, i.e. London

Additional vacancy websites to consider:

General

- Work Thing <http://www.workthing.com>
- People Bank <http://www.peoplebank.com/>

Regional

- NIjobs.com – job vacancies in Northern Ireland <http://www.nijobs.com/>
- Jobcymru.com – vacancies in Wales
- http://www.jobcymru.com/en/search_vacancies.php
- Jobs in Wales – part of the Careers Wales website
- <http://www.careerswales.com/jobsinwales.asp>

Sector/occupational

- www.bilinguagroup.com – Jobs in UK and overseas for people with language skills
- www.blis.org.uk - the job site for people with languages
- Gappweb – Accountancy and Finance Jobs United Kingdom
- <http://www.gaapweb.com/>
- Jobsin.co.uk – UK vacancies and professional appointments <http://www.jobsin.co.uk/>
- The Career Engineer <http://www.thecareerengineer.com/> An Engineering jobs recruitment website with vacancies in the UK engineering industry, including Automotive, Aerospace, Defence, Construction, Civil and Petrochemical sectors.
- SkillsActive – limited jobs in the sector advertised <http://www.skillsactive.com/>

Target group

- Activate – jobs for students and graduates <http://www.activate.co.uk/>
- Reed – jobs for graduates <http://www.reed.co.uk/>

Regional and sector specific

- NICS recruitment – job vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service <http://nicsrecruitment.vhost.tibus.com/>

Regional and client attribute

- Gradsouthwest <http://www.gradsouthwest.com/>

3.2 Consultation on the vacancy data and sources used by Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships

Four Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Partnerships across England (the Black Country, Cheshire and Warrington, London North and Suffolk) were contacted and questioned about how they collect and assess vacancy information, sources of vacancy information and the operational issues related to such information. The questionnaire is included in Appendix 1. The aim of these interviews was to investigate the information collected by IAG Partnerships and assess the possibility of whether this information could be linked to other sources of information. The interviews, however, raised a number of broader issues.

3.2.1 The IAG partnerships and the interviewees

Interviews were conducted with the Nextstep Black Country Contracts Co-ordinator, the Website and Information Officer for Nextstep London North, the Manager of Nextstep Cheshire and Warrington, and the IAG Manager at Suffolk County Council. In the first two cases, the Nextstep contract was won by Prospects, in the third it was won by Connexions Cheshire and Warrington and in the latter by IAG Suffolk. In each case the main Nextstep provider is the same body that won the contract. Each of the interviewees works in a small team of less than ten staff, contracting Nextstep provision to anything from 12 providers in Cheshire and Warrington to 43 in the Black Country. Contractors include some very small specialist organisations, for example those providing IAG services for ex-offenders or people with mental health problems. Each Nextstep organisation facilitates a much larger IAG network, for example of over a hundred members in London North.

3.2.2 Collecting vacancies information

None of the four Nextstep organisations collect their own vacancy information or primary data on vacancies. The process of selection and the criteria used for interrogating new sources of vacancies information were therefore not applicable to the current position of these four IAG partnerships.

Vacancies information and providers

Interviewees pointed out that to understand fully the use of vacancies information within the broad local IAG network would require contacting individual providers (and in the light of the large number of providers, this would be very resource intensive). However,

some examples of providers working with vacancies information were provided, as demonstrated by the following:

In the Black Country some providers hold information about local authority vacancies. Such information is produced by the local authorities e.g. Walsall and Wolverhampton councils.

In Cheshire and Warrington a key resource is the Careersnorthwest.com website. The website is funded by the North West regional development agency and uses vacancy information from Jobcentre Plus. One of the Connexions Cheshire and Warrington directors is on the Careers Northwest steering group. The website has information for adults and young people, and includes vacancies information. Some information is also provided in hard copy.

Connexions Cheshire and Warrington has a 'Vacancy Line' that provides information about vacancies, but this is aimed at young people. Staff on the telephone line periodically contact employers who may provide vacancies information and local employers will ring in with new vacancies. Business Link is another source of information, especially because Business Link has a target for attracting young people into modern apprenticeships. Jobcentre Plus also provides information for the Vacancy Line.

Nextstep London North works with Prospects and any relevant work that Prospects advisers do (for example, employer visits), is fed back to Nextstep London North.

In Suffolk there is a good network of Jobcentres, so Jobcentre Plus vacancies information is readily available for clients moving between Jobcentre Plus and IAG providers. In some places IAG providers are actually located in Jobcentres, in others the two are geographically very close. Therefore clients move between the two and there is considerable contact between advisers in Jobcentre Plus and IAG providers, despite there being no formalised vacancy information exchange system.

Other sources of vacancies information

Other sources of vacancies information that were referred to were: Worktrain (Nextstep Cheshire and Warrington have given providers training on how to use this source), Fish4jobs, local newspapers and general local knowledge of major employment opportunities (Ikea opening in north London was cited as an example).

A specific issue that was highlighted was that there are a very large number of potential sources of information, which can be a problem in itself.

Interviewees also commented that specialist providers will have a good grasp of what is appropriate within their field.

Vacancies information and the role of IAG partnerships

An additional matter raised by interviewees was how the collection of vacancies information relates to the role of IAG partnerships. Points made by interviewees included:

- if vacancies information is already publicly available, there is no value in this being (re)collected by another organisation i.e. Nextstep organisations would not necessarily be adding value in doing so;
- IAG providers are not a job placing service. Having immediate access to currently available vacancies is not necessarily a priority, nor the role of IAG providers; vacancies information is readily available from Jobcentre Plus offices;
- very often the next step for a client is a training or education route, rather than directly a job route;
- Jobcentre Plus only carry a limited proportion of total vacancies. What advisers will say to clients is that 60 per cent of vacancies never get advertised and the client should write their CV, network, find out who they need to target, and make contact with employers because jobs may never be advertised at all;
- a common question from clients is 'if I invest time and money and retraining to do xyz, will there be a job for me at the end of it?' Therefore vacancies information for advisers is not about 'yes, here is a job you can apply for today', it is about building more *general* local labour market information (LMI) into the IAG process.

This raises the issue of distinguishing between vacancies information and more general, contextualised LMI.

Some of the websites used by IAG partnerships include: Worktrain; Fish4Jobs; Careersnorthwest; totaljobs.com; Adult Directions; Prospects North London. In some instances, this was supplemented by local information from employers.

3.2.3 Vacancies information and LMI

Interviewees distinguished between vacancies information, defined as immediately available job opportunities, and LMI, defined as more general information including issues such as labour market trends and skills shortages. While none of the IAG partnerships collect vacancies information all are involved in work on LMI, although in different ways as the following examples demonstrate.

Nextstep Black Country sends a monthly mailout to providers and recently included an LMI pack. This consisted of an information booklet produced by the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and a list of useful websites, compiled by Nextstep Black Country. Members of the Nextstep Black Country network are currently being asked what sort of LMI they would find most useful. Responses are awaited.

In its regular newsletter to providers, Nextstep Cheshire and Warrington is now including a section on LMI. This is done through a focus on a specific geographical area within Cheshire and Warrington. Careersnorthwest.com includes a section on 'major projects', which provides information about major new employment opportunities e.g. Omega in Warrington (a new development aimed at attracting high-tech firms).

Nextstep London North has been involved in a pilot project regarding LMI in north London. The research covered six sectors including social care, manufacturing and retail. Local employers were visited to obtain information about the type of vacancies available. Reports are available on the Nextstep London North website as part of the LMI section. The findings were also presented to NextStep and Connexions advisers in north London.

Suffolk IAG have done previous work on LMI looking at its use by advisers, with funding from the DfES¹⁵. Additionally, a working group has recently been set up consisting of Jobcentre Plus, Suffolk IAG and the local LSC specifically to look at LMI (there is now a written protocol setting this out). The group has looked both at local and national sources of LMI. Jobcentre Plus have undertaken some local research on the type of vacancies they carry compared with the jobs that clients want; which has shown a significant mismatch between the two. Suffolk IAG will share the research findings with providers through a monthly bulletin it produces and sends to providers and members of the IAG network. Each bulletin has a theme and the autumn edition will have LMI as its

¹⁵ Pawlewski, S. (2003) Local Labour Market Information for IAG Advisers and Clients, DfES/Suffolk IAG

theme. That bulletin will also include a précis of recent work done by the local LSC on priority sector skills. Half a dozen sectors have been identified as priorities in Suffolk. These include hospitality and social care. Work done by the LSC on these sectors includes interesting information about trends and skills needs, which can be précised.

Additional sources of LMI identified by interviewees included the National Guidance Research Forum; the Advice-resources team which is part of the National Resource Service and has information such as *LMI Matters* on the Learndirect website; Prospects products such as *All About Work* which includes national, West Midlands and north London information which is also available on the Nextstep London North website; NOMIS; and sector skills councils' websites.

A specific issue that was identified is that it is easy to find large amounts of LMI but getting it in a format which is usable in a relatively short guidance interview (possibly only 20 minutes) is problematic. Accessibility of information is a key issue.

3.2.4 Operational issues

In seeking to draw together themes regarding operational issues relevant both to vacancies information and more general LMI, the following key points are evident.

There is diverse experience of how information is **in practice** collected by the different IAG partnerships. In terms of vacancies information, the IAG partnerships are dependent on others to provide information; this may be through Jobcentre Plus, websites such as Worktrain or Fish4jobs, or Nextstep providers themselves. With regard to LMI, Nextstep Black Country has used LMI provided by the local LSC; Suffolk is involved in inter-agency working with the LSC and Jobcentre Plus; Nextstep North London has undertaken its own research; and Cheshire and Warrington draws on the careersnorthwest.com website.

The **resourcing** of the collection of information is equally diverse. Resources may in effect be provided by external organisations e.g. Jobcentre Plus, the north west regional development agency, local LSCs or even individual Nextstep providers if they produce their own vacancies information. Nextstep North London received funding to do its own research; but the dissemination of LMI to providers is resourced by the Nextstep organisations themselves.

With all four IAG partnerships, the **geographical coverage** (including regional, LSC area and borough information) of any vacancies information or LMI is restricted to the area covered by the Nextstep organisation.

Geography is the key way information is **classified** although some of the work described above does take a sectoral approach.

In terms of ensuring that information is **up-to-date**, the four IAG partnerships are dependent on the providers of that information. One issue that was mentioned was that the LMI pilot project in North London was undertaken a year ago and is already a little out of date but there are no resources for updating.

Vacancies information is primarily seen as being **used by** clients, and advisers in dealing with clients. LMI is seen as useful for managers, for example in annual planning there is a need to bear LMI trends in mind so as to decide where to position services, and which sub-contractors to use.

Interviewees were not aware of any issues as to how vacancies information is **used by advisers**, although it was commented that advisers use resources to reflect their personal preference and the usefulness of sources, and advisers are encouraged to do things like look at local newspapers, which any good adviser will do so;

3.2.5 Further development

None of the IAG partnerships plan to do work on vacancies information, but all will continue to develop LMI as follows:

- there is possible scope for developing further the relevant section of Nextstep Cheshire and Warrington's own website to include LMI;
- if funding is available Nextstep London North would be very keen to do further work on LMI;
- Nextstep Black Country will develop further its LMI work as evidenced by asking network members (consisting of IAG providers and advisers) would find most useful in terms of LMI;
- Suffolk IAG will continue working with the local LSC and Jobcentre Plus, and explore any further opportunities for work on LMI as they arise.

3.2.6 Linking local information to a national database

None of the interviews saw any reason why, in principle, local information should be linked to a national database. Operational issues that would need to be addressed include IT compatibility, and resources.

3.3 Key issues in collecting vacancies information and LMI

The key issues identified in this section in collecting vacancies information and LMI include:

- **resources** (time and staffing);
- **accessibility** of information and ease of use;
- **sharing information more widely with partners** – there is potentially a need for local information to be shared more effectively. Knowledge about vacancies is often held within an organisation, but there is perhaps a need to work even more closely with partners. For example, Nextstep London North has regular meetings with Jobcentre Plus but perhaps more could be done in terms of sharing Jobcentre Plus and Worktrain vacancies information. The development of the Regional Skills Partnerships could have a role in developing a network of information sharing;
- **funding** – a problem of short-term funding is that it tends to mitigate against developing longer term initiatives, especially because at local level the scope for allocating money long-term is very limited. It is hoped that an organisation such as the National Resource Service can develop this kind of work more effectively than can be done at local level. Other options would be for IAG partnerships to work on a regional basis. For example, Suffolk IAG currently works on a regional basis with other partnerships on a number of ESF projects regarding skills.

Having reviewed and assessed the types of online vacancy sources and local information currently used by advice and guidance organisations, the next section focuses on occupational information currently available to the practitioner community.

4. Review and evaluation of occupational information

This section examines and compares selected occupation information which is available both online and in hard copy (including information that is in a printable format and viewable online). Two further websites containing occupation information are also reviewed as representing information that is not necessarily aimed at clients. After evaluating this information, gaps in the existing written resources on occupations are highlighted. This section also proposes recommendations about the type and format of occupational information for future provision of such information.

Aims of this section:

- to review and compare occupational information on selected websites;
- to undertake an in-depth review of occupational sheets on the NRS;
- to identify gaps in the NRS occupational sheets; and
- to recommend a presentational style for occupational information.

4.1 Comparative review of selected occupational information

Various sources of occupational information that are available online and in hard copy have been selected for review and comparative purposes. These diverse sources not only represent information from a variety of organisations, but the different types of data that are available. Information from the following organisations has been included for review:

- Learndirect;
- Careers Service Northern Ireland;
- Prospects; and
- Sector Skills Councils (including skillset and CITB-ConstructionSkills).

Occupational information available on two further websites is also reviewed as representing further sources of occupational information which are different from the other reviewed sources. These two websites include:

- National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) website; and
- Futureskills Scotland.

Types of occupational information currently available (excluding the NGRF website and Futureskills Scotland):

- job description including work duties, activities and requirements, work conditions;

- key roles;
- personal characteristics and qualities required for role;
- salary indicators (limited availability);
- entry requirements (together with adult entry requirements):
- qualifications and training information;
- career development opportunities and prospects (limited availability);
- sources of vacancies;
- links to useful sources;
- typical employers;
- case studies;
- related occupations; and
- contacts and resources.

Table 4.1 highlights the availability of such information from the various sources using information for different occupations as illustrative examples.

Review of selected occupational information

Learndirect

<http://www.learndirect-advice.co.uk/helpwithyourcareer/jobprofiles/>

There are over 700 job profiles available on the Learndirect website which are accessed by the user choosing a category including:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| • administrative and clerical; | • manufacturing and engineering; |
| • alternative therapies; | • marketing, selling and advertising; |
| • animals, plants and land; | • medical technology; |
| • arts, crafts and design; | • medicine and nursing; |
| • catering services; | • performing arts, broadcast and media; |
| • construction; | • publishing and journalism; |
| • education and training; | • retail sales and customer service; |
| • environmental sciences; | • science and research; |
| • financial services; | • security and uniformed services; |
| • general and personal services; | • social services; |
| • info technology & info management; | • sport, leisure and tourism; |
| • legal services; | • storage, dispatching and delivery; |
| • maintenance, service and repair; | • transport. |
| • management and planning; and | |

Job profiles are listed for each category. Each job profile includes: the work; hours and environment; skills and interests; entry; training; opportunities; annual incomes; and further information. Each occupation includes an outlook prediction (for example, growth, stable or decline).

Careers Service Northern Ireland

<http://www.careersserviceni.com/Cultures/en-GB/ExploreCareers/OccSearch/>

A search for occupational information can be undertaken using an alphabetical search or using a more detailed search (including job title, key word, subjects, salary scale, skill level and work type). This detailed search also allows the user to search by 'job family' which is a very comprehensive list including broad occupational groups and sectors, selected examples follow:

- agriculture and fisheries;
- biomedical engineering;
- broadcast and film;
- catering and hospitality;
- civil service;
- complementary medicine;
- computers and IT;
- construction;
- dental services;
- education and training;
- environmental health;
- financial services;
- fire and rescue services;
- hairdressing and beauty care;
- geography, geology and other earth sciences;
- journalism and writing;
- languages information and culture;
- legal and political services;
- nursing and paramedical services;
- photography;
- travel and tourism;
- social work and counselling services;
- sports and outdoor pursuits;
- transport and logistics;
- veterinary services and animal care;
- woodworking and furniture.

Occupational information can be viewed on-screen or printed and includes: occupational overview; the work; entry qualifications; adult entry (not available for every occupation); training; annual income; personal qualities; prospects; case studies; further information; and related occupations. Two further sections, employer profiles and FAQs, are included, but seem to be in development.

Prospects (aimed at graduates)

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Explore_types_of_jobs/p!elmjX

The occupational information available on the Prospects website is classified by job category and occupational role. Job categories include:

- administration;
- advertising, marketing and PR;
- animal and plant resources;
- arts, design and crafts;
- construction and property management;
- counselling, social and guidance services;
- education, teaching and lecturing;
- engineering;
- finance and management consultancy;
- health care;
- hospitality and events management;
- human resources and employment;
- information services;
- insurance and pensions and actuarial work;
- IT, economics, statistics and management services;
- law enforcement and public protection;
- legal services;
- leisure, sport and tourism;
- logistics and transport;
- manufacturing and processing;
- natural resources and the environment;
- publishing, media and performing arts;
- sales, retail and buying; and
- scientific services.

Information on each occupational role is comprehensive and can be viewed on screen or printed as a four page document. Occupational information includes: a job description; typical work activities; work conditions; entry requirements; training; career development opportunities; typical employers; sources of vacancies; related occupations; and information sources.

Sector briefings are also available on the Prospects and include information on: the sector as it is, as it was and as it will be; big players; a world view; getting in and getting on; key roles; more roles; case studies; notice board of news in the sector; jargon buster; contacts and resources.

Sector Skills Councils

A wide range of occupational information is available from the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) (see Table 4.1 below). Although many SSCs are under development, the majority of the SSCs contain some information, whilst only a few have comprehensive information. Some SSCs present occupational information in the form of case studies (see for example e-skills UK and SkillsActive) in which employees discuss information on: what the job involves and their responsibilities; who they work with; a typical day;

their experience and qualifications; the training they have received; their personal characteristics; what they enjoy about the job; and what they plan to do next. The occupational information available on two SSCs is reviewed as illustrative examples of the kind of information that is produced by highly developed SSCs.

- skillset

The skillset occupational information is based on their sector job profiles and are available as downloadable pdf documents. Each fact sheet is two pages and is very comprehensive and could be used by both practitioners and clients. The occupational information has an introduction which includes an overview of the occupational role, characteristics of the job, responsibilities and work conditions. Further information is divided variously under the following headings: the work; essential knowledge and skills; typical career routes; training and qualifications; and where to go for more information. Occupational information is available for: film; computer games; creative roles; technical roles; writing and production roles; and programming and broadcasting roles. In addition to the occupational fact sheets, skillset offer numerous job profiles for the audiovisual industries which presents a brief job description and what the job involves.

- CITB-ConstructionSkills

Occupational information by CITB-ConstructionSkills is available online and as a consequence is quite brief, but could be used by both practitioners and clients. Occupational information includes: the job; the people; entry requirements; the benefits including an average salary expectation.

Table 4.1 Overview of Sector Skills Councils' websites with regards to occupational information

Sector Skills Council	Occupational information available
Asset Skills Sector: Property, housing, cleaning and facilities management	Qualification information for some roles.
Automotive Skills Sector: The retail motor industry	Several roles available in the form of a one page summary including: task/duties; and qualifications needed.
Cogent Sector: Chemicals, nuclear, oil and gas,	Not available yet.

petroleum and polymer industries	
CITB-ConstructionSkills Sector: Construction	Several occupations listed, available in the form of one page including: summary of job; the people; entry requirements; benefits of the job; and salary level.
Energy & Utility Skills Sector: Electricity, gas, waste management and water industries	Brief summary of roles in the sector, but no specific occupational role information is available.
e-skills UK Sector: Information technology, telecommunications and contact centres	Several roles available in the form of a two page printable document of a profile from someone working in that occupation includes information on: what the role involves; a typical day; experience and qualifications; and personal characteristics.
Financial Services Skills Council Sector: Financial services industry	Links to other sites with occupational information.
GoSkills Sector: Passenger transport	Limited occupational information, but not specific occupational role information
Improve Sector: Food and drink manufacturing and processing	Information on several roles in the sector is available including: job duties; example of a working week; skills needed; routes into role; training; ongoing opportunities; and salaries.
Lantra Sector: Environmental and land-based industries	Some information on occupations in the sector including: role duties; and how to get into the sector.
Lifelong Learning UK Sector: Community based learning and development, further education, higher education, library and information services, work-based learning	Qualification information.
People 1st Sector: Hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism	None.
SEMTA Sector: Science, engineering and manufacturing technologies	Links to other sites which may provide occupational information.

Skillfast-UK Sector: Apparel, footwear and textile industry	None.
Skills for Care and Development Sector: Social care including children, families and young children	Website in development.
Skills for Health Sector: All staff groups working in NHS, independent and voluntary health organisations	None.
Skills for Justice Sector: Custodial care, community justice and police	None.
Skills for Logistics Sector: Freight logistics industry	Several occupational roles available, information includes: job requirements; working conditions; personal attributes; routes into the sector; job prospects; and annual Income.
SkillsActive Sector: Active leisure and learning	Some occupational information available in a printable format, but is in a case study format.
skillset Sector: Broadcast, film, video, interactive media and photo imaging.	Comprehensive information on many occupational roles in the form of a printable two page fact sheet includes: brief overview; the work involved; essential knowledge and skills; typical career routes; training and qualifications; and where to go for more information.
Skillsmart Retail Sector: Retail	Job descriptions are available by telephone request.
SummitSkills Sector: Building services engineering (Electro-technical, heating, ventilating, air conditioning, refrigeration and plumbing)	Limited information available, but not occupational specific.

National Guidance Research Forum website

<http://www.guidance-research.org>

The occupational information available on the National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) website is difficult to compare to the other sources reviewed as it is focused on occupational trends and the information available reflects this difference. The LMI Future Trends strand of the NGRF website has information on 30 sectors that each include an occupations page. The information available on these pages is inconsistent because the information is compiled using available data. Occupational information on the NGRF website variously includes:

- information on the main occupations and groupings in the sector;
- key roles and typical occupations in the sector;
- occupational profile;
- links to case studies;
- occupational changes and trends;
- employment numbers (including changing composition of sector);
- full-time, part-time and self-employment patterns;
- replacement demand;
- future trends in sector occupations and structure;
- future skill requirements;
- changing occupational composition of sector;
- employment projections;
- skill gaps and shortages;
- career pathways;
- main occupations of graduates in the sector;
- opportunities for progression; and
- occupational demand.

Futureskills Scotland occupation skill reports

<http://www.futureskillscotland.org.uk/web/site/FSSReports.asp?subtypeid=17>

The occupational information which can be downloaded as a pdf document from the Futureskills Scotland website is compressive but limited to ten broad occupational groups including:

- administrative and secretarial;
- associate professionals;
- elementary;
- general occupations;
- managers and senior officials;
- personal services;
- process plant and machine operatives;
- professionals;

- sales and customer services; and
- skilled trades.

The occupational skill reports are approximately four pages and contain more detail about specific occupations within the broad grouping. Occupational information for each grouping includes: key messages; what do they do?; how many are employed?; job openings 2002-2007; who is employed?; how and where do they work?; what do they earn?; and further information. The information is comprehensive and is presented using a combination of text, bullet points and charts. There is a good balance between retrospective information, current and future trends.

4.2 Evaluation of occupational information resources

The occupational information available from the six selected sources is similar, but the detail and type of information is varied. The online presentation of the information is different with some sites simply listing the information under set headings, whilst others combine pictures, case studies and menus to make the information more appealing. The availability of occupational information as downloadable and printable pdf documents is limited.

Table 4.2 (below) represents the comparative review of selected occupational information highlighting the type of information that is available and the availability of this information. Although, all the sources include some of the occupational information listed, all fail to include all types of information suggesting that there are some gaps in provision.

The information on the Prospects and the National Resources Service (NRS) websites are very comprehensive. However, the Prospects website does not include information on career routes in the occupation which is available on the other reviewed sources. It is only the Prospects occupational information sheet that lists vacancies sources.

The Careers Service Northern Ireland also contains comprehensive occupational information and is one of the few sites offering information on adult entry requirements. A case study is also available for each occupation in addition to the standard occupational information. Although some Sector Skills Council (SSC) websites include occupational case studies, these are not supported by other occupational information.

Table 4.2 Comparative review of occupational information on selected websites

Occupational information	Source and occupational information reviewed											
	Learndirect		Careers Northern Ireland		Service		Prospects		Skillset		CITB-ConstructionSkills	
	solicitor	bio-technologist	veterinary nurse	motor mechanic	automotive engineer	secretary/administrator	director (film)	games designer	architect	town planner		
job description including work duties and activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
work conditions (i.e. hours and environment)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X				
personal characteristics/qualities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
salary indicators	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		
entry requirements	X	X	X (1)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
career routes	X	X					X	X		X		
qualifications	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		
training	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
career development opportunities and prospects	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
typical employers	X	X			X	X						
case studies			X	X								
sources of vacancies					X	X						
related occupations			X	X	X	X	X					
contacts and resources including websites	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		

(1) Information on adult entry routes is also included.

The occupational information available on the SSC websites is varied and inconsistent (see above); of the 22 SSC websites reviewed only eight websites had occupational information available (includes those sites that presented occupational information in the form of a case study). The information available on the Skillset and CITB-ConstructionSkills websites demonstrate how variable the available information can be. The occupational information on the Skillset website is the most comprehensive compared to other SSC websites and would meet the need of both practitioners and clients.

The NGRF website and the Futureskills Scotland occupational skill reports represent the only two examples which include future trends and predictions. Although the use of projections can date the information quickly, it is needed the most by practitioners.

4.3 Gaps in provision that exists for written resources on occupations

Clear gaps in the provision for written resources on occupations are difficult to identify. When several sources of occupational information are combined a comprehensive source so information can be compiled. However, the increasing demands on practitioners time means that practitioners do not have the time to search for the necessary information and compile a comprehensive set of information to either up date their knowledge or use with a client.

Many of the sources of occupational information represent a retrospective or snap-shot in time approach to the information. The NGRF website and Futureskills Scotland skill reports address the need for information on future trends and predictions about a specific occupation. However, both sources are limited. For instance, the NGRF website has partial information on specific occupations, but does try address this gap by linking to occupational information on the SSCs, Prospects and professional association websites. Although the Futureskills Scotland skill reports is the best example of combining information on current occupational information (such as job role, where and how they work etc.) and future trends, it is restricted to ten broad occupational groupings.

The review of selected occupational information suggests that the following types of information are missing or limited:

- career routes and pathways highlighting opportunities for progression;
- typical employers;
- case studies;

- related occupations;
- main occupations of graduates in the sector; plus
- sources and links to vacancy websites and information.

It is important that the information presented contains current information about an occupation together with future trends and predictions such as:

- job openings and locations;
- future employment levels;
- occupational drivers of change;
- replacement demand;
- future skill and qualification requirements;
- future skill gaps and shortages; and
- occupational demand.

Overall, occupational information is best presented both online and as a downloadable document for practitioners and clients. A combination of factual occupation information, retrospective and future trends information is required in order to meet the needs of practitioners and clients, but more importantly to produce a comprehensive source of information.

The next section considers in some detail the presentational style of current LLMI and presents a template to guide the structure of this type of information in any future resource developments.

5. Presentational style of Local Labour Market Information

Practitioner feedback consistently emphasises the need for LMI to be available in an accessible format (see section 1, above). However, advice and guidance practitioners have responsibility for a very diverse range of clients and the needs of these clients vary – both in accordance with the stage of their career development and their ability to make sense of LLMI. Unsurprisingly, therefore, perceptions of ‘accessible format’ are likely to differ. A review of selected local labour market information (LLMI) currently available online was therefore undertaken as part of the feasibility. The results are presented in this section together with details of the types of information that can be accessed. This section also reports on the consultation with several guidance practitioners and clients regarding the presentational style of nine selected examples of LMI and the interpretation of ‘technical’ LMI. A template for presenting LLMI online is recommended that takes account of the feedback from these practitioners.

Aims of this section:

- to review the presentational style and format of available LLMI.;
- to report on the LMI consultation with advisers and clients;
- to evaluate the presentational style of interpreting ‘technical’ LMI; and
- to recommend a template for the presentation of online LLMI.

5.1 Overview of online local labour market information

Several issues were highlighted during the review of current LLMI available online including:

- there is little agreement as to what LLMI would be most useful and is needed, because different stakeholders require different information at different times for different purposes;
- much of the LLMI available online goes rapidly out of date¹⁶;
- very specific information is available, but may only be of interest to a few;
- LLMI is sometimes not easy to find, for example regional and sub-regional LLMI is not consistently available for each area and is not available at the same regional agencies;
- the LLMI that is available online is reasonably comprehensive;
- there is a need to avoid replication of LLMI so a thorough review and evaluation of available online data has to be undertaken; and

¹⁶ However, it is salient to note that some LLMI has a longer currency than others.

- there is currently no standard formatting or presentation style.

The issues identified within online LLMI means that its use by practitioners is time-consuming as it needs to be searched, extracted, interpreted and compiled before it is in a useable state.

5.2 Review of selected local labour market information online

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/BusinessZone/economyandbusiness/etu_statsupdate_winter04.asp

Information on statistics on employment, unemployment (claimants), training, vacancies, European funding, challenge funding economic development and demographics in the Royal Borough published in Winter 2004. Produced by Royal Borough Research and Information Department Economic Development Unit. It uses the Labour Force Survey, Annual business Inquiry, MYE and the New Earnings Survey.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)

<http://www.hie.co.uk/LEC-area-profiles.htm>

The area profiles review demographic and economic changes in the Highlands and Islands Enterprise network's LEC areas. HIE's strategic planning and research team has produced a suite of area profiles, commenting on the economic status of each LEC area and an overview for the Highlands and Islands. It was last updated in December 2003.

East Sussex County Council

<http://www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk/community/factsandfigures/keydata/>

Key data includes statistics on the sub-region:

- population (ESCC and ONS data) to 2011 on age structure, migration, ethnic groups, towns and parishes, births and deaths;
- households;
- housing;
- economy (ABI; ASHE, key statistics for local authorities, ONS, Agricultural census) on employment, unemployment, businesses, skills, earning, development and workforce projections;
- transport;
- waste and minerals; and

- environment.

Skills Insight – South East

- Skills Insight Annual Skills Review 2003/2004
- <http://www.skills-insight.org.uk/mainpage.html>
- Includes: South East productivity in the face of global competition; the supply of skills; the demand for skills; the information and communication technology (ICT) dimension; sub-regional issues; and sectoral issues.
- Skills Insight Skills Review Update 2002
- <http://www.skills-insight.org.uk/reports/pdfs/SkillsReviewUpdate02.pdf>
- Content includes: projections of industrial sector change; projections of occupational category change; IT skills; generic skills; and labour turnover rates. The sub-regional projections include: Berkshire; Hampshire and Isle of Wight; Kent and Medway; Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; Surrey; and Sussex.
- Skills Insight sector fact sheets
- <http://www.skills-insight.org.uk/mainpage.html>
- Sectoral areas covered include: digital media; automotive; aerospace and defence; marine technology; composites; environmental; pharmaceutical and biotechnology; construction; business and financial services; culture and creative; transport; rural; tourism and hospitality; early years and childcare; plus retail.

Yorkshire Futures <http://www.yorkshirefutures.com>

Yorkshire and Humber in Figures 2003

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/region_in_figures_winter03/Yorkshire_and_Humberside.pdf

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • population; | • employment trends over | • secondary schools with |
| • special groups; | time; | sixth forms; |
| • lone parents; | • employment by industry; | • GCSE/A level |
| • ethnic minorities; | • self employment; | achievements; and |
| • district level ethnic | • travel to work; | • FE colleges; |
| groups; | • economic activity; | • WBL providers; |
| • people with disabilities; | • home working; | • adult and community |
| • care providers; | • earnings; | learning; |
| • employment; | • unemployment; | • entrants to higher |
| • employment structure; | • education structure; | education; |
| • employment by type; | • secondary schools; | • qualifications of adults; |

- basic skills;
- general skills;
- learning activity.
- skills needs;
- ICT skills;

District level information

<http://www.yorkshirefutures.com/cb.aspx?page=D4CA33CB-826F-4D25-939E-12B68C29023D>

Districts covered include: Selby; York; Richmondshire; Ryedale; Scarborough; Craven; Hambleton; and Harrogate.

Other online LLMI for consideration:

Regional observatories

- East Midlands Observatory – Intelligence East Midlands
- <http://www.eastmidlandsobservatory.org.uk>
- East of England Observatory <http://www.eastofenglandobservatory.org.uk>
- GLA (Greater London Authority) Data Management and Analysis Group (DMAG) <http://www.london.gov.uk/gla>
- North East Regional Information Partnership <http://www.n-e-region.com>
- North West Regional Intelligence Unit <http://www.nwriu.co.uk>
- South East England Intelligence Network (SEE-IN) <http://www.see-in.co.uk>
- South West Regional Observatory <http://www.swo.org.uk>
- West Midlands Regional Observatory <http://www.wmro.org.uk>
- Yorkshire Futures <http://www.yorkshirefutures.com>

These regional observatory websites link to regional economic strategies and to other regional and sub-regional information. In some instance Sector Skills Councils have developed skills strategies for their sector by region. See for example the skillset website: http://www.skillset.org/uk/article_3240_1.asp.

It is important to note that there are local observatories in many areas. For one example, the Lincolnshire Research Observatory, see: <http://www.research-lincs.org.uk>.

5.3 Consultation on the presentational style of labour market information

Seven practitioners from various IAG contexts across England (including nextstep, higher education, further education and Connexions) were consulted on nine examples of labour market information that are currently available online and as printable documents. Three of these practitioners also consulted their colleagues informally and

as part of a focus group. The nine examples represented different presentational formats of LMI, the type of information that is available and how LMI can be disaggregated. For instance, LMI can be disaggregated to national, regional and sub-regional information, but also be sector specific. The inclusion of these different types of LMI was not only to determine the preferred presentational style of the LMI by practitioners and clients, but also to understand what LMI is most useful and needed.

The nine selected examples of LMI reviewed by the practitioners and one client included:

- Skills Insight – South East Tourism and Hospitality sector factsheet (2004) (Available online: <http://www.skills-insight.org.uk/reports/pdfs/Factsheets/TourismHospitality.PDF>);
- Business Link/LSC Hertfordshire – Action4skills The Education Sector (2005) (No longer online, other similar reports are available at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk/herts/Documents/SubjectListing/LocalSectorData/default.htm>);
- Agcas/Graduate Prospects – Cultural Sector Briefing (2003) Available online: http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Explore_job_sectors/Cultural/As_it_is/pleebfcp;
- EEDA/East of England Regional Assembly – Rural East Suffolk Objective 2 Area Labour Market Profile Census 2001 (2005) Available online: <http://eastofenglandobservatory.org.uk/download.asp?id=12529>;
- Futureskills Scotland – Local Economic Forum Profile: Glasgow (2004) Available online: <http://www.futureskillsscotland.org.uk/uploadedreports/Glasgow.pdf>;
- Connexions Coventry and Warwickshire – Working in Coventry and Warwickshire (2005) Available online: http://www.connexions-covandwarks.org.uk/index.asp?parent_id=904&slevel=0z571z903z904;
- Nomis – Rugby Labour Market Profile (2005) Available online: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431962/report.aspx?town=rugby>;
- EEDA/East of England observatory – East of England Economy & Labour Market Background paper (2005) Available online: <http://eastofenglandobservatory.org.uk/webdocuments/approved/ftpuploads/sfsgapr05.pdf>; and
- Learning and Skills Council – Strategic Area Review (StAR) Sector Report for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (2004).

Practitioners were asked to examine the nine examples of LMI and to consider several issues including:

- usefulness of information (i.e. meeting the practitioner and clients’);
- accessibility and interpretation (i.e. is it easy to read and understand?);
- how the LMI is analysed;
- format;
- length;
- text, graphics and charts used to present the information;
- geographical and/or sectoral coverage;
- divisions of data such as gender, age, industrial sector, occupation;
- gaps in the information;
- publisher and publication date; and
- robustness and reliability of data.

Where possible practitioners were asked to present this information to a client to determine whether they would find it useful and their presentational preferences. However, presenting the information to a client proved difficult as clients were only concerned with information specific to their interests and/or their region.

After the LMI examples were reviewed by the practitioners and, in one instance, by a client, a telephone interview was conducted with the practitioners to discuss the issues. Overall, practitioners had very strong initial impressions and reactions to the LMI, which, under normal circumstances, may have influenced the use of the data. For example, one practitioner who is not comfortable with tables and charts was immediately put off by the LMI presented in the Skills Insight, Nomis and EEDA reports. In general, the LMI examples were considered to be client unfriendly. Four practitioners stated that they would not use any of this information directly with clients (with the exception of the Prospects and Coventry and Warwickshire information); it would have to be mediated as it is far too detailed and technical. However, the practitioners were able to give an insight into the types of LMI used with clients and what formats clients liked from their own experiences. The exercise has highlighted the different needs of clients and practitioners regarding LMI and its presentation.

The following presents a summary of the responses regarding each issue using the reviewed LMI as illustrative examples. A recurring issue for practitioners was that LMI should not only be useful, but more importantly be accessible so that information could be read and understood quickly.

Usefulness of information

LMI is considered useful when it meets the needs of practitioners and/or clients, and conveys the information in a certain way. For example, LMI that is useful contains:

- future forecasts and demands as well as recent trends;
- information on which sectors jobs are likely to be in the future;
- case studies (such as those included in the Prospects LMI);
- links to useful websites such as vacancies in the sector, trade and professional associations (such as those included in the Prospects LMI and the Glasgow Local Economic Forum Profile);
- entry routes, chances of getting employment in to a sector and where jobs are likely to be located;
- industrial information;
- population trends;
- conveys careers, education and guidance messages;
- uses current business news (regional and sub-regional context) (although out of date, the section presented in the East of England Economy and Labour Market background paper is a good example);
- turnover rates;
- information on short-term working, whether people are using their skills and what skills they need;
- data on growth in the sector and specific occupations;
- national, regional and definitely local information (including local news and issues);
- a list of the big employers in the sector/region; and
- drivers of change in the sector; and
- recommendations for action.

All the LMI examples received mixed reviews; positive comments on some elements were criticised by others. The presentational style, format and content of the LMI were dependent on the practitioner's preferences and how they would use the information. However, it was agreed by all the practitioners that the examples in combination included information that they would find useful for themselves and their clients. Some comments on the usefulness of the examples follow. Only one practitioner wanted detailed information and statistics.

The Tourism and Hospitality sector fact sheet by Skills Insight was considered helpful and very well written by some as it was restricted to three pages and used a mixture of

text, graphs and bullet points. Similarly, the StAR sector report for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly was noted by two practitioners as very useful with good coverage and a clear layout. Although it is the longest of the LMI examples presented to the practitioners, this did not negate its usefulness to most of the practitioners. One practitioner suggested short synopses for each section would have been helpful as found the document too long to digest.

The Graduate Prospects LMI on the cultural sector was favoured by five of the practitioners. It was recognised as useful because of the format, length and style of language, but was criticised by one practitioner for being too broad to be helpful. Information on SMEs in the sector and the role of the freelance was considered very useful to both practitioners and clients. Equally, the Connexions Coventry and Warwickshire online resource received both positive and critical reviews. This resource was considered useful as it started with factors about the sub-region and linked this to skills, industry growth, transferability of qualifications and occupational roles. However, one practitioner criticised this data as it presented statements without further context, which could be misleading. For instance, the statement 'There are a large number of jobs in manufacturing in Rugby and Coventry' is true, but is misleading as it does not contextualise this with local information and news that these jobs are in decline. Others liked the layout and length of the document.

In contrast, the Learning and Skills Council Hertfordshire education sector report was immediately rejected by two practitioners as it was considered too lengthy, too wordy and included too many charts to assimilate. Three other practitioners found the document interesting, easy to read and containing useful information (such as the drivers for change in the sector and employment forecasts). The information presented in the EEDA labour market profile using the 2001 census data was also found to be interesting (particularly the travel to work areas) but was too complicated. However, practitioners were unsure how to use this data and why they would use it with a client or why it would be valuable to a client. Several practitioners thought this would be of more use to employers. The East of England economy and labour market background paper by EDDA also received critical reviews. All commented that this was very dense and poorly presented, did not use accessible language and failed to meet the needs of the practitioners.

The Futureskills Scotland local economic profile of Glasgow was regarded as representing a useful layout, but was too complicated to be useful. The Rugby labour

market profile by Nomis was criticised for the number of tables and not considered useful to careers work.

Overall, the usefulness of the LMI was dependent upon the circumstances (with whom and for what purposes the data was required and going to be used). For instance, the Graduate Prospects and the Connexions Coventry and Warwickshire information was obviously aimed at young people and the Connexions practitioner would go to this information first. However, this information would not be detailed enough to use in a presentation to colleagues.

Several practitioners emphasised the importance of future trends and projections data. The further education practitioner, who was working with adults thinking about or starting a college course, would like to know what the future labour market will and where future jobs are likely to be. Frequently asked questions by students which highlight the need for projection data include: if I do this degree where will it get me?; will I get a job?; how many jobs will there be?; and where will these jobs be located.

Finally, data that was presented with little or no context was not regarded as useful. For example, one practitioner stated that the table reporting the number of people engaged in industrial sectors interesting (see EEDA labour market profile), but it was not useful as did not provide any context or interpretation of the data. LMI that referred to trends and issues but did not go into much detail was not found useful (see for example the Graduate Prospects LMI).

Accessibility and interpretation

The issues of accessibility and interpretation of LMI focused upon how easy the practitioners were able to read and understand the information. The use of technical language, jargon and unexplained acronyms were all noted as complicating the interpretation of the information. The excessive use of numbers which are not represented graphically were also considered to be inaccessible by some. Many of the LMI examples were found to be accessible and could be interpreted easily. However, all the practitioners said that the LMI examples, with the exception of the Graduate Prospects and Coventry and Warwickshire profile, could not be used with a client as they required too much interpretation by the client and were too lengthy and detailed.

Analysis of LMI

Although some of the LMI examples were well presented and easy to navigate, the analysis was thought to be simple and superficial (see for example Prospects and Coventry and Warwickshire profile). There was a clear dislike for static LMI and census types reports (see for example Nomis and the EEDA labour market profile) as some analysis and interpretation of LMI was considered important by all the practitioners

Format

The format of LMI was an important issue for many of the practitioners consulted. The formatting issues of LMI were focussed on enabling practitioners to scan the document quickly and effectively for key information, but also to read in more depth where time is available. Suggestions for formatting LMI included:

- an executive summary;
- a summary or synopsis at the beginning of the document and/or each section/chapter;
- regional or sectoral facts at the beginning of the document;
- the use of boxes to summarise key messages;
- a combination of text and graphs;
- charts followed by bullet points drawing out the key issues;
- bullet points;
- heading to signpost paragraphs;
- the use of accessible language;
- final conclusion; and
- links to useful websites, vacancies, professional bodies and trade associations.

Although the information is not detailed enough to be useful, the format and presentation of the Prospects LMI was noted to be the most user friendly. Similarly, the presentation of the Glasgow Local Economic Forum Profile was liked by a few practitioners, but the formal and turgid nature of the writing style was complicated and off-putting.

The Learning and Skills Council Hertfordshire education sector report was considered to be a very good example of format, presentation and content by several of the practitioners and the two focus groups. A minor point of criticism for this LMI was that it used too much text in places. This report contains an executive summary, a good balance between text and charts, clear headings, accessible language, sub-regional information, key messages for each section and a clearly defined sector. However, some practitioners found this report to be too long.

Several practitioners valued the way that some LMI was both available online and as a printable document.

Length

Although the length of the LMI examples were not unmanageable for most of the practitioners, it was noted that LMI which could be realistically scanned was important. The identification of salient points was an essential part of the scanning process as demonstrated in the Glasgow Local Economic Forum Profile and the StAR report for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly.

Only one practitioner stated that length was not an issue for him as he needed detailed information. Other practitioners stated that the length of a document is not necessarily off-putting, but more whether the document can be easily navigated so that it can be scanned efficiently for the required information. However, for two practitioners, the length of the LMI documents was a key determinant as to whether to look at the document. The StAR report was criticised for being far too long.

A two page LMI document (both available online and as a handout) was considered adequate length for clients. Practitioners, however, felt comfortable with 10 pages or a maximum of 15 pages if the content was presented well. However, three practitioners would prefer three or four pages of information.

Text, graphics and charts used to present the information

Three of the practitioners interviewed expressed a preference for information to be presented in a text format, rather than in tables and charts. One practitioner, who stated that she would normally skim over tables, found that as she had had the time to read the tables and charts properly, she had not found them difficult. In terms of user-friendliness tables and charts were found to be intrinsically off-putting to some practitioners. However, three practitioners preferred the use of tables and charts as they could draw out general trends effectively. One practitioner commented that the graphics and charts were good for both practitioners and clients as they provided a visual respite from text.

Two practitioners commented that the font size was an important issue in the presentation of LMI with a preference for larger font (i.e. the Connexions Coventry and Warwickshire online resource).

Practitioners noted that tables and graphs need clear explanations and terms need to be defined (exemplified in the Nomis report).

Geographical and sectoral coverage

Some practitioners found it difficult to determine whether geographical or sectoral coverage was more useful. The majority of the practitioners highlighted the preference for sector coverage, in the first instance, which has a regional or local element. One practitioner stated that she and her colleagues would prefer geographical coverage of LMI and ideally local labour market information. The focus groups said that both geographical and sectoral coverage was needed, such as the Learning and Skills Council Hertfordshire education sector and the StAR reports. The reports were considered to be useful examples of good sectoral coverage for a region and regional information with sectoral coverage. Overall, practitioners were suggesting that they need to read both geographical and sectoral information.

The higher education practitioner explained that, as a starting point, she would need sector coverage and national sector trends, but as a large cohort of students do not wish to relocate she needs to be aware of regional and sub-regional information and opportunities. In this instance local labour market information is a necessity and needs to include case studies from local employees, but also local employers in the industry talking about what it is like to work in the sector, what changes are expected and what skills are being used by the workforce.

Disaggregations of data (such as gender, age, industrial sector, occupation, etc.)

Although it was noted that much data on gender and age existed, LMI in terms of other dimensions of disadvantage was missing. Data on other dimensions would be of great interest to some practitioners. Gender, age and disability information were noted by several practitioners as particularly useful divisions of data. Pre-NVQ level 2, returners, the over 50 and lone parents were also considered (by one practitioner) to be useful divisions of data and unobtainable. Although gender was of specific interest to two practitioners, others felt it was of less importance and easily found.

Access to information on dimensions of inequality is highly valued and interesting particularly when presented in a user-friendly way. Data on, for example, the age of entrants into a sector and the age structure of the existing workforce is useful, but information on which sector organisation is actively recruiting older workers is more useful. Therefore, it seems that although statistical data on dimensions of inequality are

useful, contextual data is required. Suggestions for contextual information included: case studies; information on how these inequalities and/or issues are being addressed; how underrepresented groups are being encouraged into the sector; information on the different entry routes; and how retention issues are being tackled.

Occupational divisions of data were also considered important by one practitioner.

Gaps in the information

A significant gap in the LMI identified by two practitioners included contextual information for the data to enable practitioners to use the information with clients. For instance, where a sector identifies skill shortages and diversity issues, information on how these are being addressed and how under-represented groups are being recruited.

A user critique of the robustness and reliability of the LMI would be helpful in determining whether to use information or not, particularly those who do not have the skills and knowledge to judge data under this criteria.

Although most of the LMI contains some future predictions and trends (such as future skill shortages), one criticism of the LMI was that it is retrospective and not forward looking. One practitioner stated that it is interesting that a skills shortage exists in a particular sector is highlighted, but what is needed is an understanding of what are the access points and entry routes into sector to complement the presented data.

More information is required on the relevant professional bodies, link to vacancy websites, trade publications, etc., that can be forwarded to clients interested in the sector.

Publisher and publication date

The publication date was a key factor in the use or non-use of LMI by all the practitioners with obviously a preference for up-to-date information and charts. Accessibility and current data were more important to one practitioner than who had actually produced the information. Practitioners wanted information to be up-dated regularly either every three or six months, annually or every two years. One practitioner stated it had to be clear when it was updated and when it was going to be updated, as variable updating can be problematic. One guidance organisation as policy would have a disclaimer attached before its use with clients for LMI produced more than a year ago.

Although questioned about the authors and publishers of the LMI, practitioners used their own knowledge to determine whether an author/publisher was trustworthy, unbiased and that the data is correct. For example, LMI from a well-known organisation, such as the Learning and Skills Council and the Sector Skills Councils, was immediately trusted. It was noted that information produced by a professional body is sometimes difficult to evaluate. For two practitioners, it was important that information is produced by an unbiased and neutral source. For instance, an independent survey of future trends would be more trusted compared to particular organisation within the sector.

Robustness and reliability of data

The robustness and reliability of data is an essential element of the production of LMI, but for practitioners judging data in this way is not undertaken. Most practitioners are judging LMI and its reliability on the author, writing style and presentation. For instance, if the report or website has been sponsored by local government it is considered reliable. Some practitioners admitted to not having the skills to judge the reliability and robustness of data, or that they had to make quick decisions about reliability as did not have the time to analyse the information in any depth.

The EEDA Labour Market Profile using the 2001 Census data was noted by one practitioner to be the most questionable in terms of reliability simply because it used the census data.

Using LMI with clients

A practitioner working with young people would use general, broad LMI about the kinds of employment that are growing in a particular area, where there are limited opportunities and what skills are (and will be) needed in the sector. The type of LMI used with clients is usually based on local knowledge and locally generated information (defined as 'soft' LMI). Some examples of LMI used with clients included: Future Trends on the NGRF website; general information produced by Connexions and the Learning and Skills Council (but is published randomly); and information from careers journals and publications such as Newscheck.

The LMI examples presented in the pack were considered by one client to be complicated and lengthy. Detailed statistics are rarely used with clients. Although the client consulted supported this claim, he did like graphics and easy charts. Some interpretation and analysis of charts is needed, together with a synopsis of the key trends and information for clients. The Learning and Skills Council Hertfordshire

education sector report and the StAR report were considered to be good examples of the language, format of information and chart analysis that is useful for working with clients. This was supported by the client, but it was considered to be lengthy and probably would not appeal to most clients.

The higher education practitioner noted that although the Prospects LMI is aimed at undergraduates and postgraduates, they rarely find it useful. The Prospects LMI was noted to be one of the better presented LMI formats available, both online and in hard copy. However, the Prospects LMI was criticised as it gave too broad an overview of the sector to be useful to either the practitioner or the client in some instances. For the practitioner, this information was only found to be useful for giving an overview of a sector and setting the context; more depth and a regional focus was needed.

One way in which to address the needs of the practitioner and client without producing two separate documents is to include an executive summary at the beginning of an LMI which can be printed and used with a client. The practitioner could then read the rest of the document to gain a better understanding of the sector or region.

The most useful LMI for clients is when it is linked to careers information. For instance, information on job availability and job responsibilities linked to trends and growth areas in the sector (see for example the Graduate Prospects LMI). The Graduate Prospects LMI was also an example of information that could be presented online and downloaded as a handout, which clients find very useful.

Practitioner reflections on the presentation of LMI

One practitioner commented that the consultation exercise had been useful as it had given her the time to reflect upon the use of LMI and the presentation of the information had enabled or disabled the process. In addition, the exercise had given the practitioner an opportunity to update their knowledge of the kinds of LMI that is available. One suggested ways in which to encourage the use of LMI and develop practitioners' skills would be to include a section on 'how to use this with your clients' and frequently asked questions about specific elements of the LMI. This information could be divided by client group, such as school leaver, graduate and adult.

Other practitioners suggested that there was often a lack of clarity about the target audience for LMI. As much of the LMI presented was obviously intended for a more general audience, it was descriptive about what has or is happening in the sector or

region. However, it was stated that a link to how this information could be used may be used careers advisers.

One practitioner was interested in learning and linking the LMI to the local research carried out by the Learning and Skills Councils and Jobcentre Plus as this would be very useful.

5.4 Template for presenting online LMI

In order to meet the needs of both practitioners and clients, the presentation of LMI needs to be carefully constructed. The template below represents an example of what LLMI could comprise. Alongside this template several recommendations have to be considered including:

- contextual information is required to explain trends and forecasts to ensure that information is not misleading;
- general and broad sweeping trends together with obvious statements should be avoided;
- there needs to be a careful balance between too much detail and not enough information, and too much text and too many charts;
- the use of charts and graphical representation of trends is essential to some, but needs to be complemented with some interpretation and analysis to be useful;
- ensuring the inclusion of occupation, regional and sub-regional information where possible;
- accessible language and the explanation of terms is needed;
- key messages, synopses, summaries and conclusions are all considered useful ways in which a document can be effectively read and understood;
- bullet points and headings are needed to create a clear layout together with good use of font and colour;
- information needs to be available online and as a printable document.

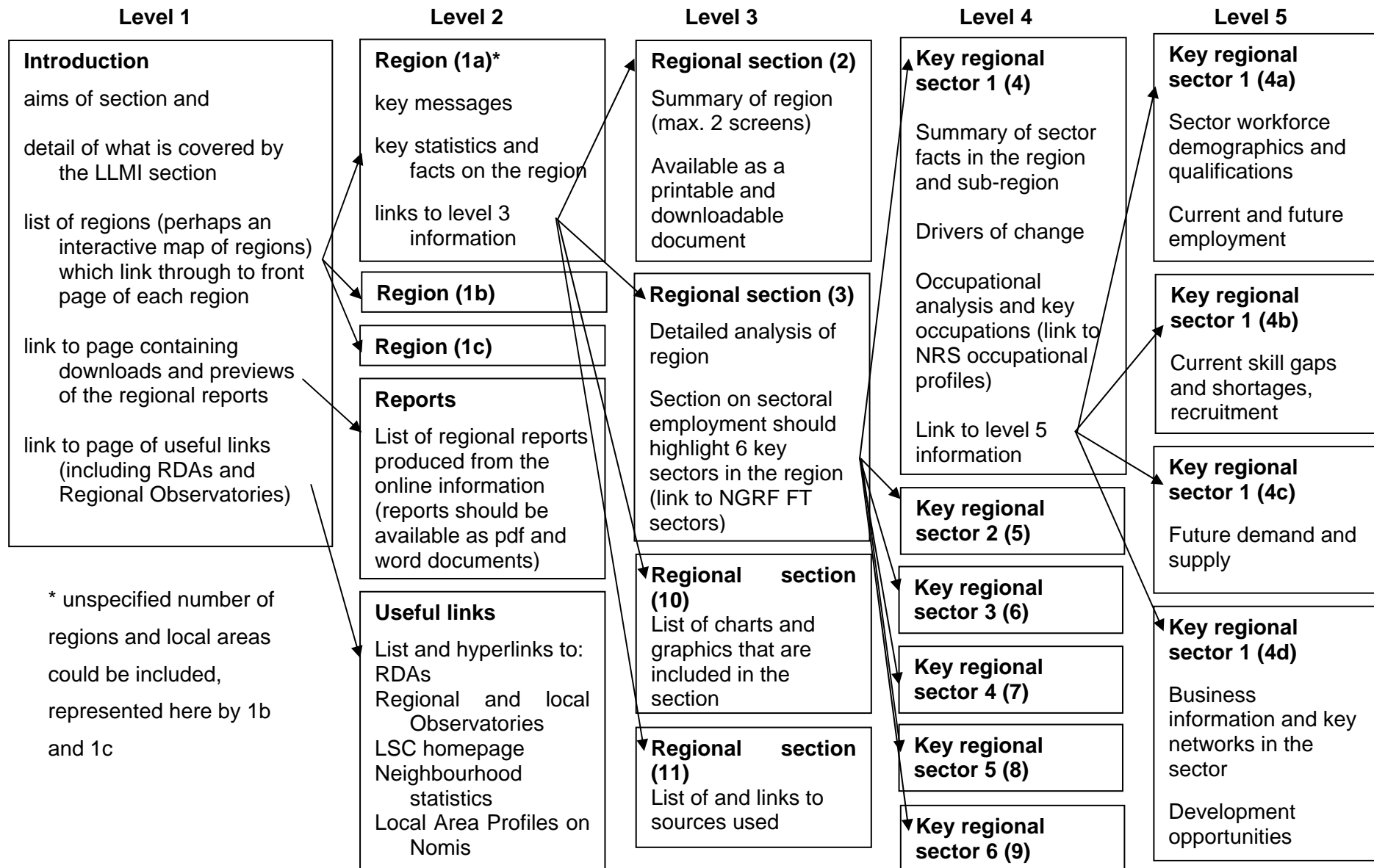
The following provides suggested topics that could be included in each of the pages. The template pages are numbered as representing their order within the downloadable regional report.

Regional section (3)

Page 3 of the regional section is a detailed analysis of the region and sub-region. All the information presented in this section should go to sub-regional level where data is available and robust. Suggested topics for this page include:

- key drivers of change;
- business base;
- economy;
- qualification and skill levels of region;
- workforce development priorities;
- sectoral employment;
- broad occupational breakdown; and
- demographics (gender, age, ethnicity and disability).

5.4 Template for presenting online LLMI – construction of a new resource



5.5 Summary of issues for presenting LMI

It is evident that practitioners and clients have very different needs with regard to LMI and how it is presented. Practitioners are much more interested in detailed LMI, future trends and graphical representations of the information. Clients are, however, more interested in the brief information with easy to understand graphs. However, for both practitioners and clients, LMI needs to be available online and in a printable format as not all have access to the internet and clients like to take handouts away. The important features of presenting LMI include: font size; clear layout and the use of colour.

From the review of LLMI online and the consultation findings several issues emerge which are relevant to the development of labour market information. These include the use of:

- regional and/or sectoral facts at the beginning of the document (i.e. Connexions Coventry and Warwickshire);
- contextual information to explain trends and forecasts (i.e. by using local information);
- accessible language;
- synopses, summaries and conclusions;
- bullet points and headings to create a clear layout (i.e. Glasgow Local Economic Forum Profile)
- a combination of text and charts (i.e. Glasgow Local Economic Forum Profile)
- statistical information with explanations; and
- key messages.

The main criticisms of LMI include:

- the failure to explain and interpret data;
- an excessive use of charts;
- charts with no analysis or interpretation;
- no contextual information;
- general and broad sweeping trends that do relate to a region;
- too much information and detail;
- states the obvious;
- the use of statements which are not explained or clarified so the reader is left 'hanging'; and
- the use of misleading statements.

The next section focuses on a particular example of a national LMI resource and examines key issues in its development, usage and maintenance.

6. Case Study: Worktrain

This section presents a case study of the development and maintenance of the Worktrain website (undertaken in part by the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick) as a basis for some of the recommendations presented in this feasibility study. The development and maintenance of the Worktrain website highlights some of the issues involved collecting and using data on vacancies, training courses and occupations.

6.1 Background to Worktrain

In 1999 the government started investigating the benefits of joining up different online work and employment resources with the objective of improving access to jobs, learning and careers information to the widest possible audience from a single web presence. By providing a single search facility for jobs, training courses, voluntary work and local childcare provision, the government hoped to create a resource to help people find jobs, re-skill and organise child care. The result was Worktrain launched in March 2001. Worktrain is a jobs, learning and career website (<http://www.worktrain.gov.uk>). Following its launch, responsibility for the site transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The site has won several awards, including Government Computing's "Best Partnership Project in the Public Service" award in 2002 and a British Computer Society Award for Innovation in 2001 and is the UK's fifth most popular government website, attracting 600,000 page requests a day.

6.2 Worktrain development

Partners

Worktrain is delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Jobcentre Plus and University for industry (Ufi). The project's information technology and delivery was provided by the business consulting; IT and outsourcing company Xansa and the design consultancy Brahm, who helped articulate the scope and vision of the service and developed the site's architecture and design. A new version of the site was launched during May 2004 which embodied a new search mechanism based upon a natural language search interface. The mechanism parses complete or fragmentary sentences and engages the user in a dialogue to find out what they want. Alternatively, from a single interaction it offers additional information which the user may not have considered. The Xansa-

developed search mechanism was delivered in association with the University of Sheffield's Natural Language Processing Group.

In retrieving information on vacancies, occupational profiles and training courses, Worktrain utilises 2 classification systems. Job vacancy information is classified according to the Standard Occupational Classification 2000 (SOC2000) by JobCentre Plus. Learning opportunities are classified according to the Learning Direct Classification System (LDCS). To facilitate the development of an internet-based resource for client searching of job vacancies and learning opportunities, the Institute for Employment Research of the University of Warwick and ADSET were commissioned to develop mappings between these classifications in order to facilitate cross-referencing of information on job vacancies with job profiles and learning opportunities.

Accessibility

The site gives users the facility to find the information they need to find work or change careers, locally, nationally and internationally in the area of their choice. The site is available from anywhere that can access the Internet, for example in libraries and UK online centres that are available throughout the country. The site is available free of charge and there is no requirement to register, although if users do register they can save their searches or bookmark pages that they find particularly useful.

Sources of data

At its inception, the site provided information on vacancies, occupational profiles, training and childcare. The site currently provides access to over 400,000 job vacancies via the Jobcentre Plus network and over 500,000 training courses and 700 occupations/careers profiles both supplied by Learndirect/University for Industry. Details of 90,000 childcare providers are made available through Child Care Link. Over time, the scope of the site has expanded to include information on voluntary opportunities. Information on over 45,000 voluntary opportunities is available via a link with a database of voluntary work opportunities from YouthNet UK via their website (<http://www.do-it.org.uk>). Table 6.2 shows the coverage and disaggregations available for the 2 search options for the site that are of primary interest within the present context, vacancies and training. More limited options are available for searches relating to Childcare and Voluntary Opportunities. Career profiles act as stand alone descriptions of particular occupations and therefore no additional search options are available.

Table 6.2 Overview of key data sources and search options

	Vacancies	Training
Geographical Coverage	GB (+Europe at country level – in development)	UK
Spatial Disaggregation	Specific location plus 1, 5, 15, 30, 45, 60, 75, 75+ mile radius	Specific location plus 1, 5, 15, 30, 45, 60, 75, 75+ mile radius
Other Disaggregation	Hours worked: 1-16, 16-30, 30+	Method of Learning: Classroom based, open/flexible learning
	Contractual Status: Permanent, Temporary, Both	Qualification Level: 17 Categories ranging from No Qualification to Doctorate
	Age of Vacancy: Up to 1 day, Up to 1 week, Up to 2 weeks	
Update Frequency	Real time, updated continuously	Real time, updated continuously

Finally, it is noted that while the feasibility of introducing LMI into Worktrain has been discussed, Worktrain does not currently embody LMI beyond that contained within the text of the occupational profiles. However, there is an area on the site which provides links to the following websites:

- Office for National Statistics (Statistics)
- Department for Education and Skills statistical website (DfES)
- Department for Education and Skills (Skillsbase) [closed down]
- information on the Welsh labour market (Futureskills Wales)
- help to use labour market intelligence (Futureskills Scotland)
- Skills and Learning Intelligence Module (SLIM)
- news and analysis of the graduate job market (Prospects)

6.3 Assessment of the Worktrain website and retrieval of information

In terms of an assessment of the site, the following discussion will abstract from issues surrounding the technical construction of the site and will focus upon the relative strengths and weaknesses of the site that arise from the nature of the 2 main databases that underpin the site; vacancies reported to JobCentre Plus and learning opportunities held by LearnDirect. The strengths and weaknesses of the site are closely related to the strengths and weaknesses of the systems used to classify information held within these databases. In retrieving information on vacancies and training courses, Worktrain

utilises 2 classification systems. Job vacancy information is classified according to the Standard Occupational Classification 2000 (SOC2000). Learning opportunities are classified according to the Learning Direct Classification System (LDCS).

SOC2000 is an aggregate statistical classification with a hierarchical structure. SOC2000 initially aggregates occupations into nine broad categories (represented by a single digit). These 'Major Groups' of SOC2000 then progressively subdivide into more specific categories. At the most detailed level (represented by four digits), occupations are classified to approximately 350 'Unit Groups'. LDCS is designed as a database management tool providing detailed classification of learning opportunities to well over 12,000 categories. Subjects of learning are divided into subject areas using an alphabetical notation. Each subject area is further subdivided into a varying number of subject areas as required by the subject. Alphabetic notation is still used at this point to provide a broad base within which to work - thus AA, AB, BA, BB, etc. Beyond this level, the subjects are progressively subdivided to tighter and tighter levels of specificity, using a decimal notation - thus CQ.8, CQ.81, CQ.811 etc. Subjects are divided into the lowest level of specificity needed, resulting in a notation that varies considerably in length. Learning opportunities are coded to the most specific appropriate heading.

6.3.1 Retrieving information on vacancies

Strengths: Completeness and accuracy of SOC coding

All vacancies notified to Job Centre plus are available for searching. The movement towards Centralised Vacancy Taking (CVT) services has led to specialist centres of expertise regarding occupational coding which should enhance the uniformity of SOC coding across regions.

Accurate SOC coding is not straightforward and it is not clear whether staff have direct access to the two volumes of the Standard Occupational Classification (Volume 1: Structure and descriptions of unit groups, Volume 2: Coding Index). However, previous research has revealed that DWP staff develop ways of overcoming problems associated with SOC (e.g. summary sheets of difficult to code job titles). Case-loading (staff specialising in certain occupational areas) and checks by line managers should further contribute to good quality occupational coding within the vacancy database.

Weaknesses: Aggregate SOC codes

SOC2000 is used in a variety of surveys to classify workers jobs (e.g. the Labour Force Survey, the New Earnings Survey, Census of Population, Family Resources Survey).

Statisticians and labour market analysts who analyse such surveys use SOC as a way of summarising the relative skill level of an individual's job and therefore do not generally require or utilise detailed levels of the classification. Indeed, the sample sizes available in these surveys often mean that detailed codes cannot be used for analysis.

In contrast, the process of matching job vacancies with clients, either by DWP or the clients themselves, benefits from the availability of detailed occupational codes. A common criticism of SOC made by DWP/JCP is that even at the most detailed level of SOC (the Unit Group or 4-digit level), the mix of skills and job content are too broad to facilitate effective job brokering. However, while there is common agreement that the UK should only have a single occupational classification (unlike the 1980s when there were different classifications for different purposes); SOC2000 will have to fulfil both a job brokering and a statistical function.

6.3.2 Retrieving information on courses

Strengths: Detailed LDCS codes

The clear advantage of LDCS in terms of the retrieval of information is the much greater level of detail it offers compared to SOC. For example, within SOC all Sports Players are coded to the Unit Group 3441: Sports Players. SOC is therefore not able to differentiate between different types of sports player. In contrast, LDCS deals with many different types of sports separately and it is therefore possible to search on learning opportunities for a particular type of sport. Even at a the relatively broad 2 character level, LDCS distinguishes between air sports, water sports, athletics, wheeled sports, winter sports, ball games, indoor sports and country/animal sports.

Weaknesses: Coverage

The availability of training information will partly depend upon whether course providers have submitted details about their courses on the LearnDirect Database. Sheffield Data Services (SDS) are contracted to collect course data on behalf of LearnDirect for England. Providers can supply information to SDS by using an online course manager system or by posting/emailing details of their courses directly to SDS. Unlike vacancies, it is not possible to verify the completeness of the LearnDirect data. Levels of coverage may be expected to be higher in some sectors than others (e.g. HE compared to FE or private provision). However, it is often the case that searches for courses that are known exist locally cannot be found through Worktrain.

Accuracy of LDCS coding:

Unlike SOC2000, the purpose of LDCS is not to code but to classify information. A short index to LDCS is available, but unlike SOC this is provided to place classifiers in the correct area of LDCS and not to assign codes. Classifiers are encouraged to allocate only a single code for a course but can use more than one if they feel that this would increase the likelihood of users retrieving the information. Similarly, classifiers are encouraged to ensure that the most specific heading appropriate for the course is being used and to check that there are not more appropriate headings that could be used. However, there are no detailed rules regarding conventions to be followed to guide classifiers to a single preferred code.

Furthermore, responsibility for coding lies with the providers of courses who wish to be included within the LDCS database. The absence of strict coding rules and a lack of experience with LDCS among those who have to classify courses are likely to lead to inaccurate and inconsistent coding. Analysis of course code frequencies reveals that detailed LDCS classes are poorly populated. It is not clear whether this is because these courses simply do not exist or whether those responsible for coding fail to allocate their courses to the most detailed areas of the classification.

Table 6.7 summarises the previous discussion. While in principal LDCS provides users the options to search on detailed categories, poor coverage and inaccurate/inconsistent coding may mean that detailed searches will fail to provide the users with 'hits'. In terms of vacancy based searches, we suspect that the accuracy of SOC coding and coverage of the vacancy data is generally good. However, due to the aggregate nature of SOC codes, searches on a comparable level to the detailed classes of LDCS are not available.

Table 6.7 Strengths and weaknesses of SOC/LDCS

	LDCS	SOC
Detail	Good	Bad
Accuracy	Unclear	Good
Coverage	Unclear	Good

6.4 Additional problems in making links between vacancies and training opportunities

Due to differences in the nature of the 2 classification systems that underpin the site, this leads to difficulties in making links between vacancies and training opportunities. The first problem relates to differences in the level of detail incorporated within the 2 classification systems. The higher degree of resolution within LDCS means that when linking from LDCS to SOC, many different LDCS categories will be allocated to the same Unit Group of SOC. Inequality in the level of detail contained within the 2 classifications may raise the expectations of users beyond that which can be achieved by the more aggregate classification. Training courses for a particular occupational area may often only be linked to an occupational group that is not able to make the same distinction. For example, at its most detailed level, SOC does not distinguish between different branches of nursing while LDCS distinguishes between different specialisms (adult, mental health, children) operating in a variety of contexts (community, intensive care)

More generally, many training opportunities contained within the LDCS database cannot be easily linked to specific vacancies or occupational profiles. This may occur because the courses are recreational in nature, relate to non-vocational academic disciplines or because they offer training in generic skills that may be useful in a variety of occupational settings.

6.5 Worktrain maintenance activities

In terms of the mappings that underpin the site, a number of maintenance activities are required to support the operation of the Worktrain website. Worktrain is a dynamic system. The Standard Occupational Classification is a static classification (fixed until 2010). The only maintenance activities associated with the SOC are the addition of new job profiles. The inclusion of additional job profiles within Worktrain therefore requires the allocation of that profile to a SOC code. However, changes are made to the Learndirect Classification System (LDCS). These changes can take the form of new codes being added to LDCS, obsolete codes being removed or the structure of the classification being changed so that existing groups are allocated a new LDCS code. The nature and distribution of learning opportunities is continually changing, either due to economic forces, others or through improvements and/or developments in the databases of learning opportunities. By requesting downloads from the Learn Direct database, changes to the mappings from both LDCS to SOC and from SOC to LDCS

can be made where it is felt that the existing mappings do not make the best use of available data.

6.6 General health warning

Users of Worktrain need to be aware that the vacancies reported to JobCentre Plus are relatively concentrated among low skilled occupations. Table 6.6 shows the ten most populated Unit Groups of the Standard Occupational Composition in terms of the number of vacancies notified to JobCentre Plus. These figures relate to November 2004 and there maybe a degree of seasonal variation in the occupational composition of vacancies notified to JobCentre Plus. However, it can be seen that the most commonly occurring vacancies relate to shop assistants, cleaners and chefs/cooks. Previous analyses of vacancies reported to the Employment Service indicated that the top 10 occupational groups accounted for approximately half of all vacancies. While the occupational profiles provide information on occupations covering a range of skill requirements and the Learndirect database of courses includes learning opportunities up to postgraduate level, the coverage of vacancies may be less suitable for those users with relatively high levels of educational attainment.

Table 6.6 Occupational concentration of JobCentre Plus vacancies

Ranking	SOC code	Job title	Total
1	7111	Shop Assistant	26770
2	9233	Cleaner	26142
3	5434	Chef/Cook	19686
4	6115	Care Assistant	17727
5	9223	Catering/Kitchen Staff	15245
6	4150	General Admin	10825
7	8211	HGV Driver	9486
8	9225	Bar Staff	8605
9	4122	Accounts/Wages Clerk	8188
10	3542	Sales Rep	7893

6.7 Evaluation of Worktrain

The Department routinely produces a wide range of statistics regarding the use of the *Worktrain* site. Data collected on the number of page impressions, visitor sessions and calls made for further details give a measure of the overall usage of the site. Information considering the operational performance of the site is also routinely collected. A variety of smaller case studies have also been conducted by occupational psychologists in order to understand how people use the site.

An online questionnaire has been implemented to collect information regarding who has made use of Worktrain and how the service was accessed. This questionnaire collects information on age, gender, region, educational attainment, current circumstances, how the site was accessed, frequency of use, ease of use and whether users would recommend the site to others. Currently, 1 in 50 of all users are randomly requested to complete the online questionnaire. Information collected from the online questionnaire enables comparisons to be made across different groups of users in terms of a) what users were hoping to gain from the site, b) the frequency with which different groups use the site, c) the number of jobs and training courses applied for through the site and d) which groups of users are most satisfied with the service being provided by the site (as measured by whether respondents would agree with the statement that 'they would recommend the site to other people').

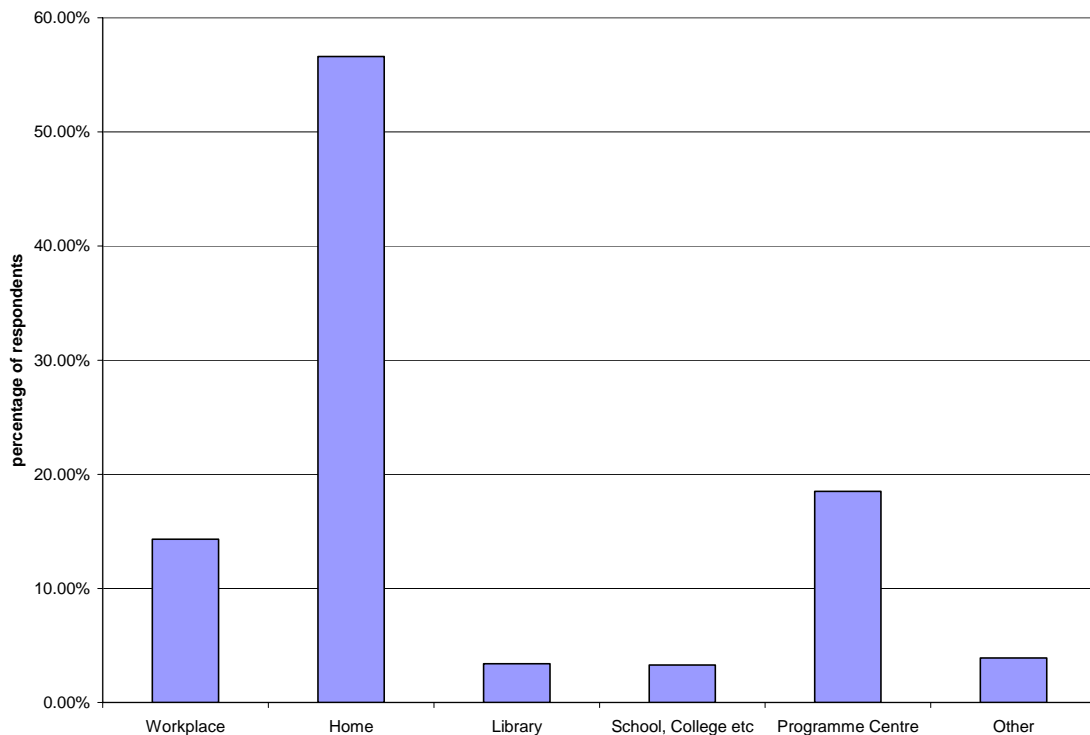
The objectives of an evaluation of Worktrain are twofold. First, to determine whether the service constitutes value for money (sometimes referred to as the 'efficiency' question) and, secondly, to assess whether this service had advantaged any particular groups to the disadvantage of others (the 'equity' issue). Concerns surrounding the issue of equity relate to the nature of Worktrain as an ICT product. While any evaluation of Worktrain must take into account the ingenuity of its approach, it is also necessary to consider that access to ICT infrastructure may be unevenly distributed across particular groups in society.

Figure 6.7 presents information from respondents to the online questionnaire regarding the location from which they access the Internet when using Worktrain. It can be seen that 56 per cent of respondents access the site from home. We must be cautious in interpreting these results due to the bias among respondents to the online questionnaire. For example, those accessing the Internet at home may be more likely to respond to the online questionnaire providing an overestimate of the actual numbers who access the site from this location. However, these findings indicate that having

access to the Internet at home could be an important precursor to an individual deciding to access the site.

This raises the possibility that knowledge of the service, and the potential benefits to be gained from its use, are not available as freely to all groups as is desirable. Inequity of access may be associated with certain negative outcomes. For example, responses from the online questionnaire indicate that approximately one third of users are in employment. Approximately half of these respondents indicate that they access *Worktrain* while at work, with 80 per cent of indicating that they are using the site to look for work. We therefore have a group of respondents who are advantaged both in terms of their current economic activity and in terms of being able to access the site freely. Would this group of respondents have accessed the vacancy information held by *JobCentre Plus* in the absence of *Worktrain*? If not, does providing wider access to information on vacancies increase competition for these jobs and make it more difficult for those who are currently unemployed to find employment? Many of the future developments planned for the site focus upon issues of how we can make the service more readily available, including the installation of highstreet kiosks and the investigation of other methods of delivery such as interactive TV and voice portals

Figure 6.7 Locations through Which respondents to the online questionnaire access Worktrain



6.8 Worktrain development and maintenance costs

The overall cost of the development and maintenance of Worktrain has been made publicly available via a response to a parliamentary question asked during March 2004. Annual estimates of the number of hits, development costs and maintenance costs are provided in Table 6.8. During the financial year 2001/02, total development and maintenance costs were approximately £3 million.

Table 6.8 Development and maintenance costs of Worktrain

Year	Annual hits	Development	⁽¹⁾ Maintenance
2003–04	⁽²⁾ 431,904,963	1,362,057	847,838
2001–02	417,416,769	1,942,769	1,022,764
2000–01	206,974,112	1,725,827	1,072,118
1999–2000	⁽³⁾ 13,435,679	1,511,487	639,766
1998–99		59,422	

(1) maintenance and development costs incorporates Worktrain For Advisers.

(2) to date

(3) launched March 2001.

The case study of Worktrain highlights the critical issues that have emerged during the development of a national resource that aims to improve access to information about careers, learning and jobs. These issues need to be taken into account when considering a national LLMI resource for advice and guidance. The Worktrain example is complemented by the next section which reviews the development of another national resource, the National Guidance Research Forum, and focuses on the technical facilities designed to support knowledge creation. This is a distinctive feature which has the potential to be adapted to build capacity within the advice and guidance practitioner community in the effective use of LMI.

7. Technical support required to facilitate knowledge creation

The provision of a high quality and reliable source of LMI is a necessary prerequisite for the delivery of effective advice and guidance, but not sufficient. Even where LMI is available to practitioners, it cannot be assumed that all practitioners have reached a level of competence in the interpretation of LMI, not can it be assumed that they feel confident and able to research reliable sources of LMI. The practitioner community requires ongoing support in the effective use of LMI in the advice and guidance process and this section considers one method of providing technical support to the practitioner community that would enable the development of a shared knowledge base for LMI online. It presents an overview of the development of the National Guidance Research Forum website (NGRF) together with the reflections and experiences of the developers of this site, with particular emphasis on the group discussion facilities of the website.

Aims of this section:

- to review the development of the NGRF website and more specifically the development of the online discussion forums;
- to examine the process of knowledge development and combination on the NGRF;
- to recommend the type of technical support required to develop and facilitate knowledge creation through online discussion; and
- to recommend how an online discussion forum could be compatible with the NGRF website.

7.1 The need for a shared online knowledge base and discussion forum

The guidance community in the UK apparently has common goals and shared practice, but represents an increasingly fragmented sector with services for adults separated from services for young people in England and further divisions created recently by the devolution of policy and practice in the four constituent countries (OECD, 2003¹⁷). As a result of this sector fragmentation, 'shared practice' within the community is problematic. Increasingly, it has seemed more logical to consider guidance practitioners, managers, policy-makers, researchers, trainers and students as a 'community of interest', with much looser ties than a 'community of practice'. In this section, the development of a shared online knowledge base and discussion forum, designed to bring research and

¹⁷ OECD (2003) OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies: United Kingdom Country Note, Paris: OECD

practice closer together for the broad community of guidance in the UK, is critically examined, with some of the lessons learned discussed.

7.2 Knowledge development and combination processes in action: the example of the National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) website

The objectives of the NGRF website are to:

- create and support an online community of interest for guidance;
- bring practice, research and policy closer together; and
- focus on the core problems of guidance practice.

A key feature of the website has been the construction of a shared knowledge base, not from an a priori comprehensive blueprint, but by being grown more organically from the contextualised problems that policy makers, managers, practitioners, researchers and trainers face. This has been achieved by forming steering groups drawn from all the above groups, as centres of expertise for particular topics. These groups met fact-to-face and have looked at key issues related to their expertise and provided a commentary on key documents and research findings online.

There are three main sections on the website, as follows:

- **LMI Future Trends** – consisting of labour market information focusing on labour market changes and skills needs in the UK.
- **Making Guidance More Effective** – containing a range of synopses, links, resources and edited discussions on six inter-related themes: Equal Opportunities (where some complex issues surrounding the equality of opportunity and guidance are explored, together with relevant legislation); Impact Analysis (here, research resources and discussions related to the impact of guidance can be found); Using Research in Practice (which provides an introduction to research processes and contains resources aimed at both newcomers and experienced researchers); Improving Practice (focused both on the theory underpinning practice and the ways in which changes - to policy or in technology - can lead to the need to re-examine and possibly rethink practice); Lifelong Learning (where the inter-relationships between learning and guidance are explored); and finally, International Perspectives (which enables participants to learn from international developments and contribute to a wider debate on current issues).
- **A database** – linking directly to the National Library Resource for Guidance, based at the Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby.

The site was launched in September, 2004 and its early success has led to major expansion plans. In the first instance this expansion has taken four directions. First, to continue to enhance and extend the LMI future trends section as this resource is welcomed as an independent and authoritative source of LMI. Second, to develop a website, through a European Leonardo project, that builds a similar capability in four other countries (Denmark, Finland, Greece and Slovenia). Third, the online discussion facilities are being redeveloped and enhanced making use of web-logging capabilities. Fourth, the section on work-related learning will be significantly enhanced and expanded as a top-level section of the site (that is, the site will henceforth have a dual focus on guidance and work-related learning).

7.3 Development of a shared online knowledge base

The project extends the use of ICT to support knowledge development for the dispersed community of guidance practice (Brown and Bimrose, 2000¹⁸). The formation of six expert work groups meant it was possible to advance understanding through processes of knowledge combination, where existing knowledge was combined with new insights to create new forms of contextualised knowledge. Previously, Brown, Attwell and Bimrose (2002¹⁹) had adopted the same type of interactive and collaborative approach to knowledge creation. This also stressed the importance of having sufficient time and space for face-to-face interactions to facilitate socialisation, externalisation (or active reflection), combination of new and existing knowledge, and the internalisation of different types of knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995²⁰; Nonaka and Konno, 1998²¹). An important feature of the new website development has, similarly, been the combination of opportunities to meet and talk through issues, engage in development work and link to continuing online discussions that facilitated the collaboration necessary for active knowledge creation. The created knowledge represents a social product, with the process of collaborative knowledge creation also representing a form of knowledge

¹⁸ Brown, A. and Bimrose, J. (2000) Establishing a virtual forum for collaboration and knowledge transformation to support careers guidance practice, in *Careers Guidance: Constructing the Future. A global perspective*, Institute of Career Guidance and Trotman: Stourbridge

¹⁹ Brown, A. Attwell, G. and Bimrose, J. (2002) Utilising Information and Communication Technologies for dispersed communities of practice, in Lally, V. and McConnell D. (eds) *Networked collaborative learning*, Sheffield: School of Education, University of Sheffield.

²⁰ Nonaka, I. and Takeuchi, H. (1995) *The knowledge creating company. How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²¹ Nonaka, I. and Konno, N. (1998) The Concept of "Ba": Building a foundation for knowledge creation, *California Management Review* 40(3): 40-54.

building where individuals (learn to) share their knowledge and create new knowledge together.

Overall, the key to this process of knowledge development has been to set up a genuinely collaborative environment, with technical and editorial assistance, for a wide range of participants. The environment enabled participants to: (jointly) develop, edit and modify materials; share annotation on material; facilitate the sharing of experience; promote discussion, sharing and collaborate actively. This was achieved by offering virtual spaces for debate and collaboration; supporting action research; offering active support and moderation; offering support to particular interest groups; and providing a forum for discussion of attempts to tackle complex problems in careers guidance practice.

7.4 Collaborative development processes: stimulating online discussions

Individuals from many organisations involved in guidance participated in the development process for the website. They were drawn from careers companies; Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) partnerships; higher education; voluntary and community sector organisations; the private sector; various government organisations and employers. Additionally, the project team actively engaged in continuing dialogue with representatives of those organisations with a strategic interest in the development of career guidance policy and practice and/or the development of labour market information. By working together, participants used the collective and individual knowledge of group members, co-constructing plans of action to extend that knowledge (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1994²²).

It is crucial for participants to be able to coordinate, clarify and regulate the discourse themselves (de Laat *et al.* 2001) whilst working and communicating together online to become used to sharing knowledge, deepen their own and common understanding and creating further insights. A model of progressive inquiry (Hakkarainen and Muukonen, 1999²³) was therefore adopted that engaged participants in the development in a step-by-step process of question and explanation driven inquiry. These were called 'team

²² Scardamalia, M. and Bereiter, C. (1994) Computer support for knowledge-building communities, *Journal of the learning sciences* 3(3): 265 –28.

²³ Hakkarainen, K. and Muukonen, H. (1999) Collaborative technology for facilitating progressive enquiry: future learning environment tools, Paper presented at the Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL '99) conference, Paolo Alto, California.

tasks' and comprised a series of particular questions, grounded in practice. de Laat *et al.* (2001)²⁴ consider that by introducing a model of progressive inquiry, frameworks, or scaffolds are developed to structure and regulate the learning activities of participants. The approach adopted for the NGRF website added still greater support to the process of knowledge building by making continuing use of face-to-face sessions which focused around the interweaving of research and practice.

Continuing collaboration and communication

The commitment of the project team to collaboration throughout the development process is central to how the site is now being operated – supporting the 'community of interest' in an interactive way. For example, the processes of reflection, consolidation and community development will be supported by presenting resources in ways that are meaningful for the community at a particular time.

Resources have also been allocated to supporting active discussions, by organising material to support discussions and establish links between current or past discussion topics. Like the discussions that took place during the development phase, it is expected that new discussions will cross topic or subject boundaries, evolve and change shape over time. This 'organic growth' of discussions will continue to be supported.

For the site to be useful to both practitioners and researchers, then participants need to be encouraged to be more explicit about their purposes and desired outcomes. Ideally, users of the site will eventually play oracle to each other - posing questions and receiving useful answers. This is central to the future purpose of the website.

As well as supporting live discussions, extensive use of discussion summaries have been made, with active editing of material by members of the project team. After discussions are finished, the discussions are deconstructed so that the separate points and strands can be placed in an appropriate context where they can be framed by supporting material (with copies of the full, original discussion archived).

Adding value to key documents over time is also a goal. For example, the project team received requests for help in learning how to undertake research from a number of practitioners. Whilst the website already has useful support materials for this, it could be

²⁴ de Laat M., de Jong F. and Simons R-J. (2001) Supporting self-regulation of learning activities in online communities of practice, Nijmegen: Department of Educational Sciences, University of Nijmegen.

rendered even more useful if examples were added of how users managed when they tried to put these ideas into practice, together with a record of discussion on this topic.

7.5 Lessons learned from the development of the NGRF website

Until now, the use of ICT to support for knowledge sharing and development has often failed to deliver the promised benefits. Whilst email has become the preferred method of communication for academia and business, and the web spawns technical, academic and leisure bulletin boards, web sites and list servers, there is still a marked lack of collective and collaborative knowledge development. What spaces there are for sharing knowledge tend to be used as collective file repositories or areas for shorter discussion. There are, of course, exceptions. Technical and software developers use the Internet as a means for co-development of software, especially in the growing Open Source Software Community. The public Human Genome project was largely made possible through intense networked collaboration using computer-based communication. Yet, these seem to be exceptions that prove the rule. The constraints of daily work and research practice mean networked collaboration – even amongst those involved in dispersed communities and engaged in common international projects – is limited. Of course, software development, despite the inertia of the larger companies, remains a dynamic and innovative industry, with new developments appearing all the time. It is possible that the software industry will produce a ‘killer application’ for knowledge sharing. The recent upsurge in web logs (blogs) is an interesting example where, whilst not invented for knowledge development, there are signs of emergent practice in sharing knowledge (Nardi, 2004²⁵). But networked collaboration is a social activity and the use of ICT can only support social interactions.

From the above it is apparent that there are problems with both the notions of ‘community’ (who are they and what goals, values and practices do they share?) and ‘practice’ (what is the practice being shared?) when considering ICT support for knowledge development. Our ideas needed, therefore, to be informed by something other than ‘communities of practice’. The difficulty in this work, and the attraction, is that it is interdisciplinary, involving a wide range of knowledge and skills drawn from a wide range of different disciplines and more importantly practices. Maybe a ‘boundary crossing’ analogy would be more appropriate. It is necessary to evolve and develop

²⁵ Nardi, B. (2004) “Getting in Conversation with Each Other Electronically”: Blogs as Mediating Artifacts at Work, Learning and Technology at Work: An international invited seminar, Institute of Education, London, 22-24 March 2004. Available online: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/tlrp/technomaths/seminar04>.

new forms of collaboration in order to support collaborative processes and to realise new forms of knowledge sharing.

Supporting practice

Lave and Wenger (1991²⁶) describe how knowledge and skills of 'communities of practice' are developed and exchanged within different communities, and how the social interactions and rules by which those particular communities of practice operate evolve and change. Those communities cannot be replicated, either through face-to-face or computer mediated networks. However, processes and tools can be developed to support the different processes and practices that occur in the 'communities' the NGRF website seeks to support. It is necessary to remember, however, that members of 'our community' belong to a variety of very different 'communities of practice' with each community having evolved different cultural and historical practices.

There is, therefore, a degree of choice about what practices are supported. In reality, most ICT based systems claiming to support communities of practice are technologically driven, based on what is feasible with present technologies. However, in so doing they often infringe other practices or processes that members of that community see as important. Similarly, the idea that communities are emergent and dynamic has escaped the designers of computer based support systems. The idea of emergence covers a number of different spheres – membership, activities, rules and practices. Flexible systems are needed that recognise the way communities evolve and allow different people to play different roles within those systems at different stages in their development. In particular, 'branching' must be allowed – in terms of new conversations or work areas branching from the main threads or even new communities breaking out.

One way forward could be to use the notion of 'boundary crossing' as a means of supporting the development of knowledge within 'our communities'. So far, most approaches pursuing this line have looked at how communities can be introduced or confronted with practices drawn from different communities, in order to promote reflection and knowledge development. This may not be appropriate here. Instead, the ways different ideas developed within communities can branch should be examined, whilst retaining a relationship to the main stem. It is important that participants can develop and follow ideas outside the mainstream of the discussion, whilst remaining in

²⁶ Lave, J., and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

the 'system'. It may well be that it is in the process of defining the relationship of such schisms to the original main 'idea set' that new knowledge can be created.

Professional development

For the NGRF website, the intention is to support professional development that is based around research and practice grounded in the questions, concerns and enquiries of a group of practitioners. The aim is, therefore, for shared rather than individual, development. There is a role for coaching, mentoring, observation by colleagues (knowledgeable others) and examples of how practitioners can engage with research. For example, a journal article could be annotated to help practitioners 'break the research code' – how to make judgements about the conclusions. There could also be value in collaboration on problem-oriented case-work (working on interpretations of a 'shared case'). A final issue relates to how to resolve emotional tensions arising from an inability to perform in the way you think is appropriate (for example, if you are not resourced to offer the quality of service possible).

Knowledge-building perspectives

Knowledge combination remains a key challenge. In distributed (computer-mediated) discourses conversations can often dwindle, so the 'knowledge spaces' for 'our community of interest' are being supported so that they can contribute to the public life of ideas. For example, the development ideas for a research project could itself be outlined as a way of representing the research process as peer review through the public disclosure of plans. Ideas and concepts can be worked on by perhaps just a few members of the community in a public space, but then the wider community may benefit.

The inter-linking of discourses, and the facilitation of different 'views' of material, can help build (or highlight the disjunctions in) coherence, comprehensiveness and links between theory and practice within and between different areas. The use of summaries, syntheses, reflections and annotations in the heavily mediated environment of the NGRF website can help with the transition between (to adapt Donald Schön's (1983²⁷) analogy) the cliff-top of critical analysis and the swamp of everyday practice.

The practitioner-researcher interactions on the NGRF website have been linked to the wider concerns of the 'community of interest'. The importance of scaffolding knowledge-

²⁷ Schön, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. How professionals think in action, London: Temple Smith.

building have been recognised: helping to develop models and viewpoints and overcoming problems of isolated contributions. The site can be seen as a representation of the stage that the 'community of interest' as a whole has now reached. Knowledge-building involves learning how to find different types of knowledge as well as learning how to learn together with collective responsibility for developing expertise and conceptual ideas.

7.6 Summary: reflections on creating and supporting a computer-supported collaborative environment

Lessons learned so far about computer-supported collaborative learning and communication and how it can help realise the aim of bringing guidance research and practice closer together include:

- there is a need for thoughtful mediation;
- the recognition that work-related learning may figure behind other aspects of private lives and working lives;
- that the goals regarding production of explanations, summaries, solving problems etc. should be made explicit;
- the value of prompts for comments, guided questioning ('what is the difference between...'; 'how does this work in practice...');
- the recognition that there are different ways of organising messages;
- that problems may arise due to a loss of motivation, a loss of co-ordination or because of a lack of feelings of co-presence;
- the recognition that making contributions to discussions can feel rather demanding and exposing;
- that participants are more likely to contribute if they have an awareness of process and what others are doing;
- how shared knowledge can build in common misconceptions;
- how collective meaning making may lead to development of certain 'voices' which may depress other voices - we all have different voices in different contexts; and
- that individuals were seeking direction, making meaning and establishing roles for themselves in their contributions over time.

The case of the NGRF website highlights the development and continued technical and editorial support required for a successful online knowledge base and discussion forum. All the lessons learned so far are relevant to the design and provision of an on-line facility that focuses on developing knowledge and understanding of the effective use of LMI in advice and guidance.

8. Conclusions

Ten key summary points arising from reflections on the review and assessment of information sources and interviews with IAGP staff/information users and other material presented in this report follow:

1. There is little direct collection of vacancy information by IAGPs, so typically there is a reliance on external sources of information.

The review conducted suggests that typically staff of IAGPs do not have time and monetary resources to devote to collection of vacancy information. Instead, reliance is placed on external sources – including Jobcentre Plus and a range of websites containing vacancy information developed by public agencies and commercial suppliers. In cases where there is involvement in collection of vacancy information by IAGPs such activity tends to be partial – for example, covering specific sectors/occupations/geographical areas only or aimed at particular client groups (e.g. young people). The existence of, and rationale for, such a partial approach is not always clear to users of the information obtained.

2. Institutional and contractual ‘clutter’ makes for a confused picture.

The contractual arrangements with which IAGPs are involved differ between local areas, but they are often complex – involving a range of different agencies. Staff within IAGPs may be reliant on others within their own organisation, or people within partner organisations, for arrangements concerning access to specific data sources. It is often the case that IAGP staff do not have a comprehensive picture about the activities of their partners with respect to employer visits and collection of vacancy information.

3. There is a lack of consistency between regions and sub-regions ... and this situation is likely to persist.

It cannot be assumed that information available in one region/sub-region is necessarily available in other sub-regions. Interviewees made reference to use of region/sub-region specific information sources – provided by both regional agencies (such as Regional Development Agencies and their partners) and commercial suppliers. Even in the case of vacancies notified to Jobcentre Plus across the country and recorded in a comprehensive fashion in Worktrain, there will be geographical variations in the proportion of total vacancies captured, reflecting spatial variations in the propensity of employers to notify vacancies to Jobcentre Plus. The trend towards greater devolution

across the regions and nations of the UK means that a lack of consistency in information availability across regions and sub-regions is likely to persist. The multiplicity of agencies and organisations involved in data collection is a further factor operating in the same direction, despite pressures for partnership working. The reality is one of a complex patchwork of information availability, both quantitatively and qualitatively, across local areas and regions.

4. The multiplicity and dynamism of vacancy information and sources means that achieving an up-to-date and comprehensive picture is likely to be difficult.

There are many different sources of vacancy information. Moreover, the sources of vacancy information are themselves dynamic. They are typically subject to refinement and development. It is clear from the review that considerable development work is ongoing – for example, by the Sector Skills Councils. This multiplicity and dynamism, coupled with the heavy reliance of IAGP staff on external sources of vacancy information, suggests the need for a comprehensive list of data sources – perhaps augmented with recommendations about usage. However, the very dynamism of the information base – encompassing the emergence of new sources, the disappearance of others, and the development and upgrading of existing sources – means that achieving a comprehensive picture is likely to be difficult, at either regional or national level. Moreover, at any one time we do not know how many vacancies there are in the economy. There is no requirement to notify vacancies to any public employment service. Moreover, not all recruitment is conducted formally. In some sectors/occupations there will be greater reliance on informal recruitment methods than in others. Some employers will prefer to use ‘word of mouth’, notice boards, etc. In some local areas agency working is prevalent. Hence, there are likely to be occupations/sectors/geographical areas where available information sources will have more partial coverage than in others.

5. There is a continuing and important role for local knowledge ... but there is also a need to place local knowledge in a broader context.

Interviewees from IAGPs report a good deal of reliance on local information and knowledge. Some highlighted the importance of keeping abreast of developments in the local press. It is important to keep in mind that no national/sub-national system of local labour market information can ever be a meaningful substitute for local knowledge from the press/media/other sources about impending local openings and closures, and other local initiatives. Such local intelligence should be used to supplement information obtained from other sources (e.g. vacancy websites). At the same time it seems

important that IAGP staff do not adopt an overly parochial view, concentrating only on opportunities in their own local area, rather than recognising that opportunities in neighbouring areas (particularly in large metropolitan areas) may well be within reach of local residents. Indeed, 'looking further a field' could be an important element in raising aspirations and broadening horizons.

6. The fact that little information is provided by vacancy websites on the provenance of information should be a matter of key concern.

Good practice in information assessment and usage suggests that it is important to have a clear picture of the provenance of information – i.e. where it comes from, its scope and coverage, how it has been collected, when it was collected, etc – in order to assess its validity and fitness for purpose; (an example is provided here by the case study of Worktrain). Yet vacancy websites often do not provide such information on provenance. The fact that some information sources are operated commercially suggests that it may not always be very easy to gather information on provenance. Evidence from interviews suggests that IAGP staff are likely to take the information at face value, often knowing little or nothing about the provenance of information sources that they are using. The fact that the information is published tends to be used as a test for its 'quality'.

7. Confusion between the robustness/reliability of local labour market information and datedness.

Comments from interviews seem to suggest that issues of robustness/reliability and datedness of local labour market information are confused. There is a clear and obvious desire for up-to-date information by staff in IAGPs, but there is a need to recognise that being 'up-to-date' is not the same as 'being robust'. The 2001 Census of Population information may be dated, but it is robust and is 'reliable' for the point in time it relates to and its utility should be recognised for information on some issues – such as travel-to-work patterns, deprivation issues, etc. In the absence of clear information about the provenance of sources, there is a danger that an over-reliance is placed on the 'date' to which information relates to the exclusion of other attributes which may be of crucial importance in judging fitness for purpose. Having access to 'up-to-date' information to inform advice and guidance is important, but it needs to be recognised that not all information sources can be, or are, updated with the same frequency, and that some types of information 'date' more quickly than others.

8. A desire for 'easy to use' and accessible intelligence by staff facing pressures of lack of time.

In general terms, there is a desire for 'easy to use' material. A key reason underlying pleas for 'ease of use' is a 'lack of time' for individuals to devote to interpretation. There is also a wish for material with 'direct application'. This suggests a need for 'intelligence' (i.e. information with 'value added'), rather than for information *per se*. There seems to be a further desire for information to be 'placed in context' and for 'interpretation' – including on 'actions' being taken (at national and local level) in response to 'trends'; (it should be noted that this is something that is difficult to achieve in an information system, and underlines the need for IAGP staff to supplement information/intelligence obtained from external data sources with local knowledge.)

9. Inconsistency in the specific contents of 'wish lists' means that deciding the scope and content of an on-line information system/facility is unlikely to be straightforward.

Moving from the 'general' desire for 'easy to use' and 'accessible' information, interviews revealed no clear consensus on the specificities of what local labour market information is required and what would be most useful. This outlines the difficult decisions about the content and scope of any on-line information system/facility. It also highlights the need for a clear and detailed specification for any such system. Reviews of examples of the content and presentation of local information sources revealed no unanimity in views; rather, features disliked by some interviewees for one reason were liked by other interviewees for the very same reason. What is "too detailed" for some is "too superficial" for others. There is only a thin dividing line between these two categories, and between being "too specific" versus "too general" and "too long" versus "too short". In part, this reflects a diverse range of user abilities in accessing, interpreting and 'feeling comfortable' with statistical information.

10. Setting limits and constraints.

The lack of consensus about specific requirements of a local labour market information resource in terms of content and presentation indicates that if resources are to be devoted to developing and maintaining a high quality on-line local labour market information resource it is important that the objectives and limitations of such a resource are made clear at the outset. This is important both for 'managing expectations' and for highlighting that such a resource is a 'supportive tool' and not a 'panacea'.

11. Training support for advice and guidance practitioners.

For maximum value to be achieved from any on-line resource it is important that training costs are built into development costs of such a system. There is an urgent need for capacity building in LMI within the practitioner community. This training support relates to the need both to develop and support competence to: access and evaluate reliable sources; manipulate and interpret data effectively; develop networking strategies; and extend knowledge and understanding through structured interactions with peers.

12. Adding value to existing resources.

Two existing websites, the National Resource Service and the National Guidance Research Forum, together represent a valuable LMI resource for the advice and guidance community. These website could be linked and developed in ways that build synergy and represent added value.

Appendix 1: Attribute list

Example of how the attribute listed may be completed for assessing the suitability of a websites focused on vacancies and LLMI. Both examples use the Nextstep London North website and represent typical examples of how this attribute list may be completed. Although the attribute list is easy to complete, it was a time-consuming process as some information was not readily available or detailed on the website. For instance, information on the general methodology of how data is collected and the provenance of the data was not included on the website, which is typical of the majority of websites assessed. However, this information is needed in order to assess the robustness and reliability of the data.

Checklist	Vacancy websites	LLMI website
	Nextstep – London North	Nextstep London North
Hyperlink	http://www.nextsteplondonnorth.org.uk/display.asp?f_name=Jobs%20and%20Training&f_id=4	http://www.learningandwork.org/detail.asp?f_name=Jobs%20and%20Training&f_id=4&t_name=Local%20Labour%20Market%20Information%20(LLMI)&t_id=75
Thematic categorisation	Job vacancies	Construction, NHS, Retail, Care, Manufacturing
Geographic coverage and spatial disaggregation	North London (Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Hatfield, Hoddesdon, Watford and Waltham Forest)	North London and borough
Other disaggregations	Key word search in job titles and job descriptions Business sector, salary level and occupations	Unknown
Data collection and general methodology	Unknown	Unknown
Frequency of data collection and updateability	Unknown	Could be update but only when data available
Use and interpretation of data	Unknown	information on current employment trends in North London for six different industries, the first ones being the National Health Service and Construction
Availability and access	Freely available	Unknown
Future plans and developments	Unknown	Local Labour Market Information will be added to this section regularly. (to include 6 sectors)
Links to and recommendations from other sites	Links to: Worktrain Haringey Council Jobs Prospects	None

	University of London Jobcentreplus Graduate Jobs and Careers Advice Barnet Council Jobs Enfield Council Jobs Waltham Forest Council Jobs Jobs in Barnet Voluntary Sector Jobs Keeping It Simple Training Careers Information/Job Profiles Local Government Careers Working in the National Health Service	
Ownership	Funded by LSC and ESF the nextstep Network is part of a Government initiative, funded by the Learning and Skills Council London North, to help adults over 20 who are learning or thinking about learning, wanting to change or get into work.	As before
Commerciality	Unknown	Unknown
Balance – other sources of info	Information on: Sample CVs Grab a Take Away! Alec's Free Jobs Search Advice Change Waltham Forest CV Tips: Types of CVs Graduates Job Searches: Newspapers Job Searches: Online Jobs Junction at Whipps Cross Hospital Local Labour Market Information (LMI) Psychometric Testing Self-Employment Volunteer Work	As before
Target users	clients	clients

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for IAGPs on vacancy data and sources



The National Resource Service (NRS) University of Industry/Learndirect Feasibility Study

Collecting vacancies information	
1. Does your IAG partnership collect vacancies information and if so, why?	
2. What sources of vacancies information are used by your IAG partnership?	
3. What criteria have been used to select these particular sources of vacancies information?	Sectoral/occupations
4. Have other sources of vacancies information been considered and rejected – if so, what were the reasons for this?	
5. Is there a process, and criteria available, for investigating the use of new sources of vacancies information?	
Operational issues	
6. How does the collection of vacancies information operate in practice?	
7. How is the collection of vacancies information resourced?	- how many people are involved
8. What is the geographical coverage of the vacancies information?	

9. Is the vacancies information classified in any other ways?	
10. How is it ensured that vacancies information is up to date?	- how regally is vacancies information collected/updated/checked
11. Who uses the vacancies information and for what purposes?	- e.g. advisers, managers, clients
12. Are there any issues as to how vacancies information is used by advisers?	
Further development	
13. Do you have any plans for the development of the collection or use of vacancies information?	
14. Would it be feasible to link your vacancies information to a national database?	- what are the issues: cost, IT, ownership etc
Conclusion	
15. What are the key issues in collecting and using vacancies information?	- local/regional/national data; occupations; etc
16. Is there anything you would like to add?	