

CAPITAL CITY PARTNERSHIP
JOINED UP FOR JOBS

Strategy Group, 2 March 2005

Note from the minutes of this meeting following discussion of this paper:

“Following discussion of the suggestion in the paper that these would require a common software platform, **it was agreed to prepare a specification of the requirements arising from these objectives, including the data which would need to be collected; to map these against existing patterns of reporting; and to discuss this work with each of the core partners**”.

JU4J Information and Communications Technology (ICT) policy

1 Background

A considerable amount of investigation now supports the introduction of a policy within Joined Up For Jobs on the use of ICT and common software, in order to improve the effectiveness both of individual providers and crucially of the whole network. The following are extracts from the evaluation of the ICT Pilot; and from the draft report of the CCP and CEC EQUAL Access programmes, which supported elements of the pilot; and further support for this proposal is found in the research done before the pilot started, of which extracts are set out in Appendix 1

Summary of ICT Pilot Evaluation:

The database has been shown to have the capacity to perform the functions requested, and these functions have been shown to have actual or potential advantages for providers and the provider network. This therefore focuses attention on issues about relations between organisations and with clients. The participants generally had a very positive response to the system. It is seen to be very useful in terms of the ease with which reports and summaries of work can be generated. However organisations have generally not used it to the full capacity; often being limited by the capacity of organisations to use IT and to manage data; and the skills and awareness of staff. Big questions are posed around effective data transfer between organisations, specifically the sharing of client data. It has become clear that there must be clear agreement between organisations; and that the kind and amount of data which might be shared is different at either end of the Service Delivery Model. It is important to get the right Data Protection practices in place, which ensure that clients have agreed to sharing of information before this is done. In practice few individuals had any objections, but policy should take into account

that a small proportion of people are unwilling to allow sharing of their information with some organisations.

Extract from Evaluation of EQUAL programme by Cambridge Policy Consultants:

“The development of the Employment Pathways Database is a key framework for understanding the effectiveness of different interventions. The software is not only designed to collect the same information from any project involved in providing employability services but also to become a learning tool for agencies to be able to benchmark their performance and see where they are having an impact because it links the support activities to individual clients. Hence this is valuable for individual projects but its real innovation is to bring this approach to Edinburgh on a City-wide basis which allows JU4J to identify gaps in provision, strengths and weaknesses across the City and to allocate resources more effectively. It is a critical element in providing the software infrastructure and the common measurement tools which together provide the foundations for constructing a joined up framework”.

From the pilot work it was possible to identify four potential aims of an ICT policy. Appendix 2 sets these out alongside comments made at a JU4J Partnership Forum meeting on this subject: Improving provider organisations’ effectiveness and ICT use; Improving provider management information; Improving effectiveness of the whole network; Improving network information.

Following discussions, it is proposed that the policy is driven by 1. the needs of the JU4J key partners for information to guide policy and funding decisions; and 2. the benefits in terms of improved network performance from creating a framework within which providers can work together better. The implementation of a technical solution to these needs should be required to support other secondary objectives aimed at improving provider performance and use of ICT.

2 Aims and Objectives

Primary aims

1. To provide the JU4J Strategy Group partners with information needed to plan and fund employment-related services in Edinburgh

Objectives:

- Gather data and intelligence;
- System-wide management information – e.g. characteristics of clients; recruitment of target groups; referral patterns; sectors being assisted;
- Measure rates of progression; effectiveness of pathways

2. To improve the effectiveness of the JU4J provider network by providing a common framework for joint working

Objectives:

- Reducing duplication and repeat work;
- Enhancing the referrals processes;
- Improving tracking and sharing outcomes;
- Improving matching to vacancies and placement opportunities

Secondary and objectives

- Improving provider organisations' effectiveness:
- Optimise ICT use and skills of workers
- Good client and employer records, assessments, action plans, prompts, distance travelled;
- Improving provider performance and management information, recruitment demographics;
- Reports to funders;
- Monitoring and evaluation

3 Software solutions

Whereas an objective of improving stand-alone provider performance does not require that providers all use the same software, it is argued here that the two objectives above, set at the system or city level, probably do.

The conventional response to Aim 1, relating to system-wide management information, would probably be to require all relevant providers to generate reports on a standard format. This however then limits the capacity to analyse the data held at that level in any terms other than those in which it has been originally reported. It also does not easily permit longitudinal analyses. The alternative process proposed here is to collect from the providers the raw data and perform the analysis centrally. The raw data would be selected fields of anonymised client records, using, for example, NI numbers and a provider code as unique identifiers. This has the advantage of lessening the burden on the providers but does require the use of common software.

The activities under aim 2 also require the use of agreed common formats for exchange of information between organisations. Notionally data in an agreed format can be moved between software, even between spreadsheets, databases and WP tables; but the process would be much easier with common software.

The intention to be able to identify when clients are on the books of more than one provider would be notionally possible with providers using more than one kind of software but in practice much easier with common software.

4 Approach to implementation

The approach adopted to date has been that the initiative should 'go with the grain' – that is, help providers move in the directions in which they wish to move anyway; and build from the current good practice. This should continue, and incorporate the insight from the pilot that it should enable and not constrain – there is a danger in some approaches that too rigid, mandatory or complex systems might constrain the diversity within the provider network by requiring all to conform to one version of, for example, client assessment or measurement of progress. This could make providers work harder whereas the intention is to generate provider benefits in order to incentivise participation.

The aim will be to encompass all relevant providers but there will be incremental implementation, learning as we go. Initially implementation should be driven by conditions of funding for core providers; in addition it should allow for voluntary participation where resources allow it. This means that the scope of the policy will largely be determined by the willingness and capacity of funding partners to implement it.

Implementation of the policy should build on existing reporting patterns and procedures and make them easier. It will require some providers to record more data than at present, for example about target groups. However this is a requirement which is arising from the needs of strategy implementation anyway, not directly from the ICT policy.

In this regard, since it is being driven by the need for information to support JU4J implementation, the key partners need to agree their data and monitoring requirements, within a common evaluation framework.

A number of issues need to be noted and addressed:

1. As agreed by the Pilot Steering Group, a common core record format (dataset) will have to be prepared and agreed. In addition a number of model protocols and procedures will have to be drafted and agreed.
2. These will include JU4J Data Protection policies which will build in both the consents necessary for the policy to work; and the option of refusing those consents if clients are unwilling to give it. This should be checked by a relevant authority.

3. The resources needed for roll-out will have to be identified and then provided. To date, the Infrastructure Development Programme has allocated £60,000, subject to detailed approval. After a certain period, providers should be expected to be able to pay for ongoing support through their own budgets.
4. There will have to be substantial training of staff and the development of capacity in some organisations. If possible this should be resourced separately.
5. Implementation should only proceed if it is certain that the core partners can provide the resources to analyse and use the information received for reporting and evaluation.
6. The development has to be aware of the existence of a number of other related databases. Integration with existing and developing databases – ECHO; LMS, PR2
7. Evaluation of the roll-out of the implementation of the ICT policy should be put in place.

5 Implementation Plan

The following is proposed as the implementation plan

1. Establish Steering Group
2. Specify what data is wanted from providers and what functionality is needed
3. Invites submissions from relevant companies; compare solutions and software against these specifications; and select.
4. Prepare common datasets, protocols, referrals agreements etc
5. Agree roll-out and costs – to cover software (if not EP), installation, training and technical support, and professional officers time
6. Determine capacity of key partners to implement through funding of providers
7. Devise and agree progressive roll-out, building from core intermediaries and selected fields of work where the foundations of joined-up working are strong.
8. Put in place capacity to analyse and report on data generated

9. Identify funding and prioritisation of allocation of resources procured with it

10. Set targets and implement evaluation regime

Extracts from Information Flow and Mapping Research by Outcomes Partnership for CCP

Our research findings demonstrate conclusively that there is recognition by the vast majority of access to work organisations of the significant benefits their respective organisations could derive from the implementation of a common information system, across the JUFJ's network. Moreover, most organisations are extremely enthusiastic about implementing ICT improvements to facilitate standardisation in the process of monitoring and evaluation; and welcome the opportunity to exchange client information, in an open and transparent environment.

If ICT standards across the city could be raised it would demonstrate the increased quality and consistency of data recording and reporting within the employability field; provide vital social economic data which can be used for benchmarking and provide learners with an industry standard and structured ICT personal development plan leading to qualifications.

By developing ICT skills and training the organisations to analysis the data, this would enhance organisations ability to identify gaps in their service, highlight best practice and ensure social inclusion milestones are being reached. If these can be resolved it would be much easier to establish 'co-ordination mechanisms that increase efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery network' across JUFJ organisations.

To share vital information about clients freely between organisations, they need to feel that they are doing the right thing by their client, that the data they exchange is appropriate and relevant information and lastly that they are not breaching data confidentiality. For this to happen there needs to be a major shift in the understanding of data protection principles across the industry.

From our finding we feel that in order for organisations to feel confident and comfortable sharing client information there will need to be a programme of change management implemented across the industry. This would need to focus on developing team work, encouraging 'real' partnerships, developing trust in other organisations, reviewing issues arising due to organisations having to compete for funding, breaking down barriers to partnership working, sharing resources and having a common goal.

We feel that it is essential for any consistent exchange of quality information that it would be useful for part of the JUFJ strategy group driving improvements in the way that client information is recorded and processed.

Research has highlighted that when organisations have formal service level agreement in place with referral organisations, they have a clear understanding of

target number of referrals, agreed protocols for transferring information and set reporting procedures. When organisations have an informal agreement with other referral organisations it tends to be adhoc, limited transfer of client data and following no set reporting procedures.

JUFJ organisations report to spending a lot of their management time applying for funding, revising applications and providing similar or the same client and financial reporting in different formats for different funders.

An overwhelming percentage of organisations have suggested that they would benefit from having improved computer systems to record, manage and report on client progress.

POSSIBLE OBJECTIVES OF JU4J ICT POLICY

Comments made at Partnership Forum presentation

Objective <i>Examples in italics</i>	Hopes	Anxieties
<p>Improving provider organisations' effectiveness and ICT use <i>E.G. Client and employer records, assessments, action plans, prompts, distance travelled,</i></p>	<p>EP is/looks effective (x3) Good standardised practice Track progress, affirm with client, prompts (x2) That it is made available at no or reasonable cost (x2) Common assessment Save time and effort Sets standard types of information Add to existing systems more detailed record collection.</p>	<p>May neglect other in-house systems - why change if working (x2) No funding Organisations put up barriers Getting started Becomes rigid and prescriptive Have to use Insight system - double entry Not the same as providing a quality service</p>
<p>Improving provider information <i>E.G. Performance and management information, recruitment demographics. Reports to funders; Monitoring and evaluation of providers</i></p>	<p>Could do this (x2) Record soft outcomes Help justify work done Easier access to stats Support and advice will be available Excellent if used by everybody Highlight good practice, accountability and consistency Measure progression Generates relevant data so allows planning</p>	<p>May not have time or skills for maximum use Interpretation of information (x2) That it creates too much information of little value, for the sake of it</p>

<p>Improving effectiveness of the whole network <i>E.G. Reducing duplication and repeat work; Enhancing the referrals processes; Improving tracking and sharing outcomes; Improving matching to vacancies and placement opportunities</i></p>	<p>Save time Improve knowledge of the actions of other organisations after referral Easier referrals, better follow-up Training – premium Encourages partnership, saves time Standardisation</p>	<p>Time to test this (years) Long pathways pathways to work would result in delay in evidence of success Need staff training and mutual trust Slowing down system if the same information is recorded differently Funding, targets, trust, barriers</p>
<p>Improving network information <i>E.G. Gather data and intelligence: System-wide management information; Characteristics of clients; Recruitment of target groups; Rates of progression; effectiveness of pathways.</i></p>	<p>Same format for sharing information Culture of trust and open-ness between organisations Sharing of stats, reports, etc. Will be great if all providers use it Regular reviews of the network required</p>	<p>No money currently available for this Culture of trust and open-ness won't happen Maintenance and development of the system – there will be a cost</p>