

Technology Update

04

For Developers of Student Management Systems

16 November 2005

Latest news on ERS implementation

This update is to brief vendors of student management systems on developments in the Education sector that may impact future release plans.

ERS went live as scheduled on October 27th. The web application is now being used by staff and providers for Training Opportunities and Youth Training transactions. Transaction volumes are low, as expected at this time of the year but the system is performing well, with no reported system errors.

The Ministry of Education's TISSL group is processing a backlog of applications from tertiary education organisations (TEOs) for access to the NSI and ERS. This is causing a few initial headaches with regard to getting transactions processed in time for billing cycles but it's a temporary situation that we expect will clear up in a week or two.

Web Services Interface Guide

We are currently working on the *Web Services Interface Guide* and hope to have the initial version published in late November 2005. This will detail the transactions with examples and will include further information on requirements to access the test and production systems.

We have working examples of the web services transactions available in Java, and we are getting these examples re-worked for a Microsoft environment. The objective is to have these ready for you in the same timeframe as the Interface Guide release.

We have discovered, in our own testing of the web services interfaces, that the permutations required for comprehensive testing of the transaction conditions are quite daunting. We will include in the *Guide* a strategy for a testing approach, and a list of example transactions and their error conditions, to assist you in checking your own systems.

As a result of our web services testing, which is still being conducted, we have found a few vague definitions in the schemas that we will clarify and tighten up with better validation rules. We will have these updated schemas available for release with the Guide.

We're working on iwi and ethnicity

We have been advised by a vigilant vendor that we don't quite have the correct iwi list in the published schema. We will publish an amended schema to fix that issue.

Similarly, the recent communication on Ethnicity codes included a chart that showed how we were mapping the codes internally for our own reporting, and this contained a minor error. We will republish this as a spreadsheet when the Guide is released.

XML work with NZQA

We have been working with NZQA to provide you with an alternative XML format for the submission of NQF results data. The intention is to:

- Provide a mechanism that would allow providers to only submit results data once to NZQA
- Include additional information in the XML format to allow the submission of a single return
- To provide a web services channel for the results file submission. This would allow vendors to provide a more transparent upload mechanism for users of their SMS systems.

Our plan was to provide a date (February 2006) where vendors, if they chose to, could make a single release of their software, which contained both the new interfaces. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen delays the infrastructure to support this will not be available in that timeframe and so we need to allow for the NZQA formats coming on-line later on 2006.

NZQA will also move to the level 3 Ethnicity codes, at the time that they go live with the XML format for NQF results data, to provide a more consistent approach for those vendors using the XML format for results.

In the interim, NZQA will not be changing the file formats for their other files to move to the level 3 Ethnicity codes.

A release plan for 2006

We recognise that you, as SMS vendors, are significant stakeholders in the sector and we are seeking feedback from you to assist us to put together a release plan for 2006.

Could you please provide us with an update on your current plans for product releases and indicate your intentions around implementation of the NZQA and TEC web services interfaces. We also welcome any other information that would assist us in understanding issues you face in planning your product upgrade paths.

We regret that, despite our best efforts, some factors are beyond our immediate control. Policy decisions may require system changes at short notice and inter-agency co-ordination can result in re-prioritisation of work as we continue to implement ERS.

Contact us

For system support in this ERS pre-production phase, Greg Smith at greg.smith@tec.govt.nz should be your first point of contact.
