

PROTOCOLS
for the development of
LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION
produced for the
GUIDANCE PROCESS
by the
SECTOR SKILLS COUNCILS

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of these protocols is to support the development of high quality labour market information (LMI), which is produced by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) ***specifically for the guidance process***, to a common standard. This LMI is needed by Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) practitioners in preparation for the full roll out of the new *Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACCS)* in England (2010/2011).

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that other bodies and the devolved administrations may already have guidance in place regarding the provision of LMI for IAG. Nevertheless, the needs of guidance practitioners and the principles and guidelines set out in this document are not country specific.

Equally, it should be noted that there are existing standards and tools already in place within SSCs (including the SSC Standard and internal quality practices), which are used to regulate and monitor the quality of SSC research outputs. These protocols, therefore, have the potential to complement and extend those already in place by focusing on the production of LMI which is produced ***specifically for the guidance process***.

1.2 Target audiences

There are two distinct target groups for these protocols:

- The primary audience are those employed by the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). Within SSCs, these protocols have been developed both for IAG/careers teams and for specialist research teams. Whilst it is acknowledged that there is considerable existing expertise, some will be more familiar with the issues raised than others. In this context, the protocols can assist with a clearer understanding of the LMI needs of IAG practitioners by identifying key principles for guiding the production of LMI specifically for the guidance process.
- The secondary audience is the IAG community of practice. Here, the protocols can help both IAG delivery organisations and individual IAG practitioners understand the nature of guidelines used by SSCs in the development of high quality LMI produced specifically for the guidance process.

1.3 Scope and background

These protocols have been commissioned by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) in preparation for the implementation of the new

Adult Advancement and Careers Service for England. As indicated above (section 1.1) they may also be relevant and useful for organisations involved in the provision of children's IAG services in England and in the production of LMI for IAG in the devolved administrations.

The White Paper 'Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work' (Department for Education and Skills, 2005¹) complements and extends the earlier 'Skills White Paper 21st Century Skills: Realising our potential' (DfES, Dti, HM Treasury and DWP, 2003²). In combination, these publications contain the government's strategy for raising the skill level of the labour force in the UK and ensuring the supply of skills in the labour force matches employer demand. Alongside a high priority given to the efficient functioning of the labour market, the importance of the personal fulfilment that can be derived from the skill development of individuals is emphasised, together with the key role for 'improved' information, advice and guidance (IAG) in supporting individuals to make more effective choices.

Subsequently, Lord Sandy Leitch was commissioned in 2006 by the government to identify the UK's optimal skills mix for 2020. The ultimate objectives of this review were to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice by setting an appropriate policy framework. The findings of the Leitch Review confirms those of the Skills White Papers (DfES, DTI, HM Treasury and DWP, 2003³; Department for Education and Skills, 2005⁴), emphasising the need for the UK to 'raise its game' by increasing the skill levels of its labour force, if it is to increase its economic competitiveness (HM Treasury, 2006, p.1⁵). It also identifies the importance of embedding a culture of learning and proposes that 'a new and sustained national campaign to raise career aspirations and awareness' will contribute to the achievement of the skills agenda (p.103), together with support to make informed choices (p.107). Specifically, for England, the Leitch Review recommends the establishment of:

...a new universal adult careers service, providing labour market focused careers advice for all adults. (HM Treasury, 2006, p.23)

¹ Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Skills: Getting On in Business; Getting On at Work*. Cmd 6483-I, 6483-II, Cmd 6483-III. London: Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved June 4, 2005: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/>.

² Department for Education and Skills, Department for Trade and Industry, HM Treasury and Department for Work and Pensions (2003) *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential [Individuals, Employers, Nation]*. Cm 5810. London: Department for Education and Skills Retrieved May 30, 2007 from: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/21st%20Century%20Skills.pdf>.

³ Op cit.

⁴ Op cit.

⁵ HM Treasury (2006) *Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*. Norwich: The Stationery Office. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/523/43/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf.

The importance of effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) to the up-skilling agenda for raising aspirations is stressed (p.106), claiming its equal importance for both young people and adults – since ‘too few young people at age 14 are making the link between careers guidance and their personal decisions’ (p. 107).

The implementation plan for the Leitch Review (HM Government and DIUS, 2007⁶) takes up the challenge of implementing the skills agenda, acknowledging that there is still ‘a mountain to climb’ (p.6). It states how the new adult careers service will ‘give every adult easy access to skills and careers advice that will help them find work and progress in their careers’ (p.7) and that this new service will ‘ensure that everyone is able to access the help they need to take stock of where they are in achieving their goals and ambitions, and to get the support they need to advance themselves and achieve their full potential’ (p.10).

1.4 Sources of Labour Market Information for IAG

As part of the strategy to provide effective support to individuals wishing to advance themselves, the crucial importance of high quality labour market information (LMI) for effective IAG is emphasised in various policy documents on education, training and IAG. For example, the final report of the Skills Commission’s inquiry into IAG states that ‘Individuals need high quality information on labour market opportunities in order to make informed choices’ (Skills Commission, 2008, p.36⁷). Whilst much high quality LMI exists, there is scope for some refinement and enhancement of the LMI used in IAG. Indeed, some policy documents are critical of the quality of available LMI for IAG⁸. Here, however, it is important to draw a distinction between:

- deficiencies in the use of LMI that is available; and
- objective shortcomings in the LMI that is available – perhaps due to small sample sizes, methodological issues relating to particular data sources, etc.

⁶ HM Government and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007) *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*. Cmd 7181, Norwich: HMSO. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: <http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/worldclassskills.pdf>.

⁷ Skills Commission (2008) *Inspiration and Aspiration: Realising our Potential in the 21st Century*. London: Policy Connect. Retrieved April 16, 2008 from: http://www.edge.co.uk/docs/content/sc_iag_inquiry_final_report.pdf

⁸ See, for example:

Foster, A. (2005) *Realising the Potential: a review of the future role of further education colleges*, DfES/LSC. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/furthereducation/uploads/documents/REALISING06.pdf>

Leitch, S. (2005) *Skills in the UK: the long-term challenge*, London: HM Treasury. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm

The Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are well positioned to collect and disseminate high quality, current and comprehensive sector-based LMI for IAG. However, they have been established relatively recently, so are at different stages of development and have different capacities. Moreover, to some extent, the amount and availability of robust LMI varies in accordance with the footprint of SSCs. That is some:

- have larger employment bases than others;
- are less easily replicable in terms of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) than others, with the use of Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC) as an alternative;
- are unable to estimate employment bases as there is a delay in national statistics collecting data on new (evolving) occupations; and
- are more reliant on atypical labour (e.g. freelancers, volunteers, etc) than others.

The LMI produced by SSCs for use in the guidance process must meet certain criteria to be 'fit for purpose'. The protocols presented here comprise two separate, but inter-related components, which together comprise a sound basis for the production of high quality LMI for use in IAG:

- core principles, underpinning the provision of quality information; and
- guidelines for the development of LMI produced by SSCs to support the guidance process which will be 'fit for purpose'.

These follow in detail in section 3, below. Section 2 provides some background, dealing with some of the key issues relating to the development of LMI for the guidance process by SSCs. These included: an exploration of the nature of LMI for IAG; definitions of IAG; the role of LMI in supporting the delivery of impartial IAG; the type of LMI that research indicates IAG practitioners need; and finally, the formats in which practitioners indicate they need high quality LMI.

SECTION 2: DEFINITIONS AND EVIDENCE

2.1 LMI for IAG

A narrow definition of a labour market refers to where employers (the demand side) and potential sellers (the supply side) exchange labour, with accurate, up-to-date information being crucial to its smooth operation. The term 'labour market information' (LMI) is not, however, confined to information on the supply and demand of labour. It is now more generally used to include any information that relates to the operation of markets for learning, skills, employment, labour and their relationship to the wider economy⁹. Hence, Luddy (2007: 16-17)¹⁰ defines LMI as: 'data about how the labour market is operating', making reference to government legislation and supporting policies, inter-relationships between labour markets at different geographical levels (e.g. through migration flows) and wider social, economic and technological change as issues affecting the operation of labour markets.

LMI comes from a wide range of sources. Although the following is not an exhaustive list, it includes:

- information on general employment trends (e.g. historical trends, future demand);
- data on the structure of the labour market (i.e. what jobs exist, how many, which sectors, which occupations);
- information about the way the labour market functions (i.e. how people get into jobs and move between employers, etc.);
- the interaction between labour demand and supply (i.e. mismatches – as reflected in unemployment rates, skills gaps, skills shortages, etc.);
- data on national, regional and local labour markets variations (i.e. size of workforce, prominent sectors etc.);
- data focusing on equality and diversity (i.e. which individuals are employed in different sectors and at what levels?); and
- information on progression routes (i.e. career structure, earnings, transferability of skills).

In the context of LMI for strategic planning, for policy formulation and for information, advice and guidance (IAG), the distinction has also been made between labour market *information* and labour market *intelligence*. In essence, labour market information refers to quantitative or qualitative data found in original information sources (typically available from surveys and reported in tables, spreadsheets, charts, etc.), while labour market intelligence relates to the interpretation of labour market information, referring to subsets

⁹ Learning and Skills Council, North Yorkshire (2002) *Guide to Labour Market Information and Intelligence*. Version 1. Aspire & Transform Ltd.: Sheffield.

¹⁰ Luddy, D. (2007) *SSC IAG project 2007/08: Recommendations for the careers information services core offer by Sector Skills Councils*. Prepared for Skillset and the Skills for Business network.

of information that have been subjected to further analysis¹¹. Luddy (2007: 17)¹² defines labour market intelligence as being 'generated by the systematic collection and analysis of different sources of labour market information'.

In a guidance context, a further distinction has been made between LMI for guidance that is *non-interactive* and *interactive*¹³. Here, non-interactive LMI is generally linear in nature, is paper-based, often broader in range and more detailed in topic coverage. Interactive LMI (using Information Communication Technology) is generally non-linear, with the user maintaining some control over the selection and sequencing of information. Other distinctions also exist between 'hard' and 'soft' data, 'official' and 'non-official' sources, etc.

2.2 What is Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)?

The term 'IAG' has become an umbrella term for the activities associated with careers guidance, though amongst practitioners its use tends to be restricted to England. The policy document which distinguished each of these three activities of IAG was published in England in 2003¹⁴:

Information relates to the process of informing clients about issues relevant to their development. Such information usually needs some interpretation (i.e. information needs to be converted into intelligence).

Advice is about helping clients to undertake that interpretation of information and select the most appropriate option.

Guidance is helping clients to: understand their own needs relating to learning and work; set and review goals/objectives for learning and work; understand their barriers to learning and work; overcome barriers/obstacles to learning and work; and to produce learning and career action plans.

The OECD (2004)¹⁵ notes how terms like information, advice and guidance, vocational guidance, vocational counselling, career counselling and career development are used to refer to a range of activities, which they include within the term 'career guidance' (p.18) and define as:

Services intended to assist people of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational

¹¹ LSC and DfES (2004) *LMI Matters! Understanding Labour Market Information*, Nottingham: DfES.

¹² Luddy, D. (2007) *op. cit.*

¹³ Sampson, J.P. Jr., Reardon, R.C., Peterson, G.W. and Lenz, J.G. (2004) *Career Counseling & Services: A cognitive information processing approach*. Belmont, CA: Thompson Brooks/Cole.

¹⁴ See the discussion document: DfES (2003) *Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults. Towards a National Policy Framework: Discussion Document*. Sheffield: DfES.

¹⁵ OECD (2004) *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap*. Paris: OECD.

choices to manage their careers. Career guidance helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications and abilities. It helps them to understand the labour market and education systems, and to relate this to what they know about themselves. Comprehensive career guidance tries to teach people to plan and make decisions about work and learning. Career guidance makes information about the labour market and about educational opportunities more accessible by organising it, systematising it and making it available when and where people need it. (OECD, 2004, p.19)

The term 'careers guidance' is commonly used amongst the practitioner communities in Scotland and Wales, with 'careers education, information, advice and guidance' recently adopted in Northern Ireland. The OECD (2004) definition has been adopted by the largest professional association for IAG, the Institute of Career Guidance.

The use of language in this area can be confusing. Amongst practitioners it can also be a sensitive issue¹⁶. A recommendation has therefore been made for SSCs to adopt the term 'Careers Information Services' (CIS) for future planning and delivery of services to support IAG delivery (Luddy, 2008, p.16).

2.3 Impartiality and ethical practice in guidance

Most adults wanting IAG usually need help preparing for and/ or finding paid employment. Not unreasonably, they are likely to assume that IAG providers to whom they turn for help will be an expert in LMI. However, it is not just the expert knowledge and information that makes IAG distinctive from other forms of help and support. It is the objectivity of the information in which IAG practitioners deal and the impartiality of the services that IAG providers offer that is often unique. In the provision of IAG, this impartiality is, therefore, crucial. Specifically, it refers to services provided to clients (which include information-giving) that are focused on the clients' best interests – rather than those which may be unduly influenced by the needs of any particular providers (that is, educational, training or employment). This contrasts, starkly, with services and information-giving that is partial. An example of partial information would be where training providers produce information for the purpose of marketing particular courses that may be slow to recruit, or represent a new offer from the organisation. The information in these cases will have been produced to address a particular organisational need.

Indeed, codes of practice promoted by various professional guidance associations (for example, the Institute of Career Guidance, the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance) place impartiality at the very centre of ethical IAG practice. To be members of these associations,

¹⁶ Bimrose, J., Marris, L. and Barnes, S-A. (2007) *Establishing World Class Careers Education and Guidance in Kent and Medway: A scoping exercise*. Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research. [http://www.connexionskentandmedway.co.uk/images/news/Research/Scoping%20exercise%20report%20\(15.11.%2007\)%20FINAL.doc](http://www.connexionskentandmedway.co.uk/images/news/Research/Scoping%20exercise%20report%20(15.11.%2007)%20FINAL.doc)

IAG practitioners must commit to these codes of practice. Impartiality is, therefore, an important issue for IAG services, both for adults and young people. Whilst it is a principle to which IAG practitioners aspire, a study of impartiality in guidance provision for adults¹⁷ found that in reality, it is often compromised (by factors like the culture of the IAG organisation or inadequately trained IAG staff, or lack of high quality LMI). It is therefore essential that IAG practitioners have impartial LMI available to use in their practice, free from self-interest and not influenced by one side of the market, to support them in offering impartial services to their clients.

2.4 LMI required by IAG practitioners

The practitioner perspective on what is required from LMI for the guidance process is critical if LMI produced for IAG practitioners is to be 'fit for purpose'. Research evidence indicates what types of information those giving IAG say they need. For example, from a small-scale survey of experienced advisers, Offer (2001, p.78)¹⁸ found that six types of information were required:

- demand for labour (how easy is it to get a job in this occupation, industry, role?);
- progression routes, career structure and earnings (what are the prospects?);
- geographical availability (how available is this in my travel-to-work area?);
- trends (is employment on the increase in this occupation or industry?);
- transferability (will I be able to transfer the competences and skills developed in this industry, should job opportunities decrease?);
- recruitment and selection methods (where and how do people get jobs in this industry?).

Hirsch, *et al.* (1998)¹⁹ concluded that currently available LMI was too heavily weighted towards early career choices. This finding is supported by data collected from IAG practitioners and managers as part of an ADAPT/ESF project²⁰ that identified the LMI that practitioners most wanted for their work with adults. This included information:

- relevant for adults (that is, on transitions in the labour market that extend beyond the first into employment);
- on new job titles, skills levels and transferability of skills;

¹⁷ Connelly, G., Milburn, T., Thomson, S. and Edwards, R. (1996) *Impartiality in Guidance Provision for Adults: A Scottish Study*. Glasgow: The University of Strathclyde & Milton Keynes: The Open University.

¹⁸ Offer, M. (2001) 'The Discourse of the Labour Market', in Gothard, B., Mignot, P., Offer, M. and Ruff, M. (Eds) *Careers Guidance in Context*, London: Sage.

¹⁹ Hirsch, W., Kidd, J.M. and Watts, A.G. (1998) *Constructs of work used in career guidance*. Cambridge: DEE/NICEC.

²⁰ Brown, A., Bimrose, J. and Hughes, D. (2005) 'Bringing Guidance Research and Practice closer together: the UK National Guidance Research Forum Website', *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 5, pp. 229-240.

- with an equal opportunities dimension;
- on salary levels (for example, on entry, after five years, etc.);
- related to trends in employment;
- changing skill requirements and skill mismatches in different sectors;
- organisational changes; and
- flexible labour markets.

Research undertaken in 2005 for one Sector Skills Council (that is, Skillset) explored the views both of sector specialists who delivered careers guidance on behalf of the SSCs, together with Ufi learndirect advisers with special responsibility for this particular SSC²¹. It identified what they considered to be the most useful and the least useful LMI for the IAG process. Additionally, it details the preferred format of LMI by these practitioners and their key priorities in the provision of LMI. These are:

The most useful LMI:

- identification of skills shortages;
- LMI relating to new entrants (like conditions for new entrants and new entrant schemes);
- regional labour market information; and
- local labour market information (including up-to-date vacancies).

The least useful LMI:

- statistical information (i.e. raw statistics without interpretation);
- LMI that is out-of-date;
- information on employees who have been in an industry for a number of years (because enquiries are mainly from new entrants); and
- information on the training needs of sectors (rather than training routes for individuals).

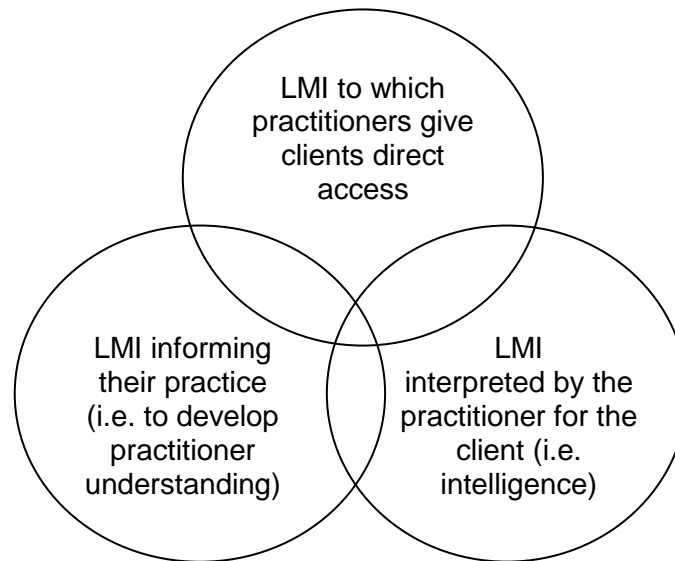
From the limited amount of research that had been undertaken in this area, consistent messages about the types of LMI that practitioners consider most useful and desirable have, therefore, emerged.

As the role of IAG practitioners develops with the implementation of the new *Adult Advancement and Careers Service* (AACS), with new information sources becoming available, it may be necessary to support the use of different forms of LMI. Overall, it is important to appreciate that the LMI needs of IAG practitioners are complex and fluid. They require LMI for a range of purposes. Just two examples include LMI to use as part of the IAG process with varied client groups who have distinctly different needs at different times of their career development, as well as for their own professional and personal development.

The following diagram attempts to capture some of the complexity related to the ways that IAG practitioners will require access to different types and

²¹ Bimrose, J. and Orton, M. (2005) *Labour Market Information (LMI) for effective guidance within Skillset*. Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research.

sources of LMI, sometimes overlapping, depending on their immediate requirements.



2.5 Preferred formats of LMI for IAG

From the research findings, IAG practitioners consistently stress the importance of the LMI being easily accessible (to avoid their having to spend considerable amounts of time searching for it) with clear presentation (i.e. well laid out; distinguishing between general background and specific information).

Web-based information is generally preferable, but with a number of caveats. These include:

- some IAG clients do not have internet access;
- some organisational settings in which IAG is delivered prohibit internet access (e.g. prisons) and in others access is not available (e.g. outreach locations); and
- downloading information can be time consuming, and costly.

LMI is therefore required in varied formats, including paper-based and continues to be critical for effective IAG. It is currently produced by different stakeholders for various purposes. Providers of IAG services have a responsibility to develop the professional competence and expertise that will enable them to mediate this information effectively in the guidance process. Equally, producers of LMI for IAG need to be mindful of the needs of different users, including IAG practitioners – who are likely to be the gatekeepers of much LMI in their work with clients.

SECTION 3: PROTOCOLS

IAG practitioners typically feel extremely pressurised, with limited time to research information. Consequently, LMI needs to be available in a simple form and in accordance with the underpinning principles (3.1) and guidelines (3.2) which are specified below:

3.1 Underpinning principles

All LMI produced by SSCs for use by providers of IAG as part of the guidance process should reflect the following general principles:

- 3.1.1 Adherence to the core ethos of **equality of opportunity** for all and compliance with related legislation.
- 3.1.2 Commitment to **impartiality**, so that all LMI produced for the IAG process does not promote one sector, in a competitive manner, as superior to any other, or mask an economic decline.
- 3.1.3 **Accessibility** to potential users, addressing physical limitations as well as the ability to understand particular levels of complexity.
- 3.1.4 That the information will be **robust**, ensuring reliability, comprehensiveness and currency.
- 3.1.5 That it should be **relevant** to the needs of IAG practitioners in their guidance work with clients.

3.2 Guidelines

Additionally, and in so far as possible, LMI produced by SSCs for use by providers of IAG as part of the guidance process should adhere to the following guidelines:

3.2.1 Ethical practice

IAG practitioners operate according to a code of ethical conduct. It is important, therefore, that they feel confident that the LMI they use with their clients meets ethical standards. Specifically, and as a baseline:

- The collation of LMI is done ethically (i.e. information has been collected with the full knowledge of respondents; where relevant, principles of informed consent have been observed).
- That the methods used to disseminate the LMI would ensure (so far as is possible) that certain groups of clients were not excluded (e.g. those without access to the internet).

- Presentational styles of LMI should adhere to guidelines on accessibility (e.g. appropriate for those who are visually impaired).
- The use of language used for all LMI is free from any bias (e.g. avoidance of sexist language, images, etc.) so that it does not reinforce stereotypical assumptions.
- Language is devoid of sector specific interest and jargon.

3.2.2 Provenance of data

When considering or using any information/ intelligence IAG practitioners need to be mindful of the data sources from which it is derived. The 'provenance of data' covers issues of 'how' data were collected, 'why' they were collected, 'when' they were collected, 'who' was responsible for collecting the data and 'where' the data were collected from. Such information enables users to make an initial assessment of the likely reliability and robustness of the data.

3.2.2.1 *How were data collected?*

- Producing a clear summary of the methodology used for the data collection.
- Being clear about the 'source' of information.
- Clearly stating sampling variation, confidence intervals and possible survey non-response bias, including the provision of 'health warnings' on the interpretation of data.

Despite the fact that IAG practitioners have limited time to digest information, it remains essential for producers of LMI to ensure that they provide an accurate note of the 'source(s)' used in the compilation of information and intelligence. Only then can users be encouraged to develop an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of different sources. 'Source' information should extend beyond a 'catch-all' title (such as Annual Business Inquiry) to provide specific references to the time period, geographical area, population, etc., to which it relates (as outlined below).

A summary of data collection methodology is also helpful (e.g. a telephone survey of X employers in Y; an online survey of A, administrative records from B, etc) – especially as guidance practitioners will be making use of information from a number of different sources, which may provide contradictory trends/messages. Hence, information on data collection methodology might provide some insights into why trends/messages differ between sources. In the case of surveys, information can be provided on the sampling frame, the size of the sample, how the survey was conducted (e.g. postal, phone, face-to-face, etc.).

As noted above, for information derived from surveys, it is good practice to provide details of the sampling frame (i.e. the population in scope) and the survey methodology – since this might result in bias, with some sub-groups in some areas being less likely to be covered than others. In any survey, non-response has the potential to cause bias. This, in turn, has implications for

the robustness and reliability of the quality of the information and intelligence derived therefrom. It is often the case that the most socially excluded and the most mobile sub-groups are least likely to be captured by surveys. Other reasons for bias in surveys include proxy responses (i.e. one individual answering questions on behalf of another) and recall error. For some surveys, validation/ data quality reports provide information about which questions worked well/ less well. For small population sub-groups, and small areas, indicators derived from survey data will be subject to wider confidence intervals than for larger sub-groups and larger areas.

It is important that IAG practitioners using information derived from survey sources are aware of any limitations, particularly when looking at trends over time, when it is possible that changes observed may be a function of sampling variation rather than 'real' change. Those supplying information and intelligence should take these issues into account when preparing material for IAG practitioners. More generally, a useful way of dealing with the issues outlined above is by providing guidance on the use and interpretation of data, flagging up any key limitations relating to particular data sources.

3.2.2.2 Why and for what purposes were data collected?

- Statement on the coverage and scope of data sources used, including the degree of disaggregation available and the classifications applied.

Data are collected for different purposes (e.g. to provide information on skills needs, as management information for monitoring purposes, etc.). Data from a range of sources which are collected for a variety of purposes are likely to be of interest to IAG practitioners. Why data were collected has implications for the coverage and scope of data sources, for the degree of disaggregation available and for the classifications used. It is relevant, therefore, for IAG practitioners to have some insight into why data were collected.

3.2.2.3 When were data collected?

- Clear specification of the period to which the data relates and how regularly data are updated and updateable.
- Ensure collection and updating of same data at appropriate time intervals to enable comparisons to trend data, including explanations on discontinuities in time series.

The time elapsing between collection and publication of data is variable between sources. In general, IAG practitioners will wish to use up-to-date data. However, it is important that they are encouraged to keep in mind that:

- (i) up-to-date data is not always 'better' (i.e. more robust or reliable) than information and intelligence derived from data sources relating to an earlier period – issues such as data collection methodology are important also;
- (ii) data sources should not be discounted merely on the grounds that they are older than a certain vintage – information on some topics

- dates more quickly than information on others and in any case some data sources are updated more frequently than others;
- (iii) in some instances relatively 'old' data may be the most up-to-date available, and may retain currency for IAG purposes.

If information and intelligence is not current and/ or is derived from dated sources, but is being used as a proxy for the prevailing situation, it is helpful to note whether there are any reasons to expect any substantial changes during the period since data collection.

In the light of the fact that information and intelligence on some topics dates quickly and that there are variations in update frequency between data sources, it is important that the period to which the data relate is clearly specified. It is also helpful to provide information on the frequency of information collection from particular sources and when updated information is made available. Some data sources may be published at a particular point in time, but are subject to subsequent revision. If this is the case, it is helpful to note this.

As far as possible, data should be collected (and information and intelligence derived from it updated) on a regular basis such that the time elapsing between data availability and conversion into information and intelligence is minimised. In the case of many topics IAG practitioners will be interested in trends over time, so updating of time series and indicators of changes over specific time periods, are likely to be of interest. Known reasons for any discontinuities in time series should be noted.

3.2.2.4 *Where were data collected from?*

- Provision of clear links to key data sources and signposting to other relevant information, including statement on the limitations on the categorisation used.
- Consistent use of disaggregated national data from 'official' sources (when making comparisons across SSCs).

As outlined in section 3 (below), data sources may use standard or non-standard classification schema. Whatever classifications used, it is important that they are identified explicitly (including the vintage of the classification, if appropriate). Some jobs/ careers/ other topics on which IAG practitioners require information are better covered by 'official' classifications than others and any limitations of the categorisations used for the purpose in hand should be noted. Likewise, it is important to make explicit the geographical coverage of a particular data source and associated information (e.g. UK, Great Britain, a specific region, a specific local area, etc.). In the absence of information on a particular local area it may be necessary to make use of regional or national level information. If this is the case, it is helpful to draw out whether any specific differences between the local situation, on the one hand, and the regional or national situation on the other, might be expected.

Ideally, when IAG practitioners are making comparisons across SSCs, it is helpful to make use of ‘official’ (i.e. Office for National Statistics [ONS]) sources with national coverage. This ensures consistency across sectors and also guarantees that the data used pass a certain quality threshold.

IAG practitioners will find some information and intelligence more useful than others, depending on the client, or professional development issues being addressed. It is helpful to provide links (Web links or other references) to further details on source data, other information on related topics, case studies of how information and intelligence has been used elsewhere, etc.

3.2.3 Data disaggregation

- Data to be disaggregated by:
 - (i) Industry/occupation – data to be disaggregated at an industry and/or occupational level using SIC and SOC classification schema in accordance with coverage and availability;
 - (ii) Other classifications of particular pertinence to the guidance process (e.g. industry and occupational roles, salary levels, graduate versus non-graduate);
 - (iii) Regional/sub-regional level – data to be disaggregated to regional and sub-regional data in accordance with availability; and
 - (iv) Dimensions of equality – data to be disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity and disability in accordance with availability.
- Being explicit about the categories (including sectors, occupational categories, geographical areas, etc.) to which the data relate (and about any associated limitations for the purpose in hand).
- It should be noted that confidentiality constraints can place limits on the disaggregation of data sources.

Various classification systems (both standard and non-standard) are available. Standard classification systems (e.g. Standard Industrial Classification [SIC]; Standard Occupation Classification [SOC]) are revised at certain points in time to take account of developments in the economy and society. There are tensions about revising classification schema. On the one hand, there are pressures to resist changes to classification systems, to maintain comparability both between data sources and over time (so enabling the generation of time series data)²². On the other hand, there are pressures to update classification systems to capture existing requirements better, to reflect the reality of new circumstances, or to address new ‘policy’ issues.

In general, there is a move towards ‘standard’ classifications and ‘harmonisation’ of classification systems. Hence, where possible it is preferable to use standard classification schema since these aid consistency and comparability for IAG practitioners. For instance, where national organisations (such as HESA) use standard categories to report on graduate employment, it would be helpful if other sources used the same categorisation

²² Using ‘conversion’ factors it is possible to match ‘new’ and ‘old’ classification systems in order to rebase statistics.

for national comparisons. Non-standard classification systems might well seem attractive for a particular purpose, but difficulties may arise when IAG practitioners attempt to draw together data sets/information using different schema, because of a lack of comparability.

In general, national data sources are more robust at national than at regional or local levels. Although it is good practice to geo-reference data (if possible), in order to facilitate subsequent aggregation to a range of different geographical units, it is not always possible to make information available at the maximum level of spatial disaggregation. While there may be pressures to provide information at local level, often also disaggregated by other dimensions of interest (e.g. industry, gender, etc.), such disaggregation cannot always be supported – given sample size considerations and confidentiality constraints. If it is not possible to provide information/intelligence at the desired level of geographical disaggregation, it may be helpful to indicate what (if any) differences might be expected between the spatial level at which information is provided and the desired level.

If information is available for a particular local area, it may be helpful for IAG practitioners to be encouraged to remember that most local areas are not ‘islands’, cut off from the influence of cross-boundary flows and developments elsewhere. On a similar theme, it is important to note 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).

Just as industrial and occupational classification scheme may change over time, so might boundaries of geographical areas (e.g. through local government reorganisation or the establishment of new regions). It is important that precise details of the ‘geography’ to which data/information refer are provided to users, especially since the same ‘name’ can refer to different geographical units (e.g. Birmingham City Council area, Birmingham City Region, Birmingham Travel To Work Area). Some of the issues here are similar to those addressed under the ‘classification issues’, immediately above. If non-standard geographies are used they need to be explicitly defined.

Where possible, data should be disaggregated by key equality dimensions. Data availability is such that this is most likely to be possible for gender, followed by age, and then ethnicity and disability. In February 2007, the Equalities Review commissioned by the Cabinet Office recommended that “a cross-cutting Government review of current data needs is a fundamental and necessary starting point if Government and devolved administrations are to properly analyse, understand and address inequalities”²³. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has a duty under the Equality Act 2006 to ‘map the equalities landscape’. The statistical work of the EHRC focuses on key dimensions of equality: gender, ethnicity, age, disability, religion/belief and sexual orientation. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has

²³ Equalities Review (2007) *Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review*. London: The Equalities Review.

undertaken a review of equality data, which reported in October 2007²⁴. The review concluded that existing sample sizes for major survey data sources were too small to yield useful information on all equality characteristics at regional/country and local scales. Moreover: *“In some cases, the total population size and spread mean that even trying to increase sample sizes will not enable an adequate analysis”* (p.4)²⁵. Small samples can produce statistically unhelpful results, so, where possible, number of respondents need to be used rather than percentage.

Confidentiality constraints place limits on the disaggregation of data sources, such that specific individuals, businesses, etc., should not be identifiable. This means that it is not always possible to provide the amount of detail (by sector, age, geographical area, etc) that IAG practitioners might want. Moreover, confidentiality constraints are set to tighten. The Statistics Act, which comes into force on 1st April 2008, places a duty on the ONS to prevent the release of information which is potentially disclosive of information on identifiable individuals. This is a particular risk for some minority groups (e.g. ethnic minorities with large families living in sparsely populated areas). Data providers may respond by reducing the amount of variable (e.g. by publishing cruder age categories) or geographical detail for some dimensions, or by suppressing data for some dimensions when the number of people falling into a category is below the threshold for disclosure of data. Under the Act, the full detail of survey data sets of which ONS is the custodian will only be made available to ‘authorised researchers’ under a ‘special licence’ arrangement.

Please note: A pro-forma designed to assist with the process of applying the protocols can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2.4 Service expectation

For LMI provided by SSCs to be useful to IAG practitioners in the guidance process, the following criteria should be met, irrespective of the particular media used for dissemination:

- (i) The role and remit of SSCs should be explained, in plain language, so that IAG practitioners can have confidence that they represent a reliable and trustworthy source.
It cannot be assumed that IAG practitioner will be familiar with SSCs and their role. An explanation of what they are and how they are funded would go some way to establishing the credibility of the SSCs with IAG practitioners.
- (ii) The overall offer of LMI services by each SSC should be clearly specified and effectively marketed.
Given that SSCs are at different stages of development and have different levels of resources for the purpose of producing LMI for IAG, it

²⁴ Office for National Statistics (2007) *Measuring Equality: A review of equality data*. London: ONS.

²⁵ ONS (2007) *op cit*.

is important for each to be explicit about exactly what LMI is being provided for the process of IAG, through what media, how it is collected, and (importantly) how often it will be updated.

- (iii) A statement should be made to give IAG practitioners confidence that the SSC employees producing the LMI have the requisite skills and knowledge for information handling, interpretation and analysis.
IAG practitioners need to understand that the SSCs all have dedicated, specialist research teams, whose remit is to collect and present information relevant for their sector. It is also relevant to make explicit that primarily, they collect data for purposes other than for use as part of the IAG process – and what these purposes are – but that LMI for IAG has been collected and presented with an understanding of the needs of IAG practitioners in their work with clients.
- (iv) The LMI provided should have (as far as possible) the potential to be interpreted for use with all ages, abilities, genders, ethnicities, etc. and throughout all four home countries.
The information needs of guidance clients will vary with regard to their age, life stage, qualification type, type of decision or transition that they are undergoing. For example, IAG practitioners wishing to use the LMI produced by SSCs will need to use the information with, for example, clients suffering from long term unemployment who wish to re-enter the labour market after a period of absence; with women returning to the workplace after bringing up children; and with employees wishing to move from one employer to another within the same sector, as well as those wishing to change their career direction from one sector to another. All such clients will make slightly different demands on the types of LMI they require, and the levels of its complexity, to support the particular labour market transition required.
- (v) LMI should be ‘fit for purpose’, with mechanisms in place for IAG practitioners to consult, where necessary.
Where an IAG practitioner has found a particular piece of LMI s/he wishes to use in the guidance process that they do not fully understand – or wish to supplement with additional information, it is important they are able to consult with sector experts. This could be by email or telephone – but a way of getting a reasonably immediate response is desirable, so that their clients in turn can get a speedy response.

For LMI disseminated through websites, the following guidelines will be helpful for providing practitioners with a high quality service for IAG:

- easy navigation, with clear signposting (e.g. site map, A-Z), an efficient search engine and links to other sources of relevant information;
- the use of understandable language, which is jargon free;
- print friendly versions of downloadable documents (including high resolution images of charts); and
- a point of contact – with an indication of how a query will be dealt with and within what timescale. Ideally, this should cover queries

concerning data and other requests like how to locate speakers on sectors and work experience contacts.

In terms of content, the following would be highly valued by IAG practitioners:

- a section on the site dedicated to careers in the sector;
- FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) reflecting topical issues;
- case studies of different types of clients making their way in the sector (e.g. women returning to the labour market; graduate entrants; Apprentices);
- information on entry requirements, application processes (e.g. Apprenticeships), and especially wherever applications are centralised;
- opportunities for progression;
- information on 'new' job titles, skill levels, transferability of skills and career paths;
- information on opportunities for adults changing career direction;
- data on employment and labour market trends and forecasts;
- qualifications – different types of qualifications needed/acceptable and approved courses (where these exist);
- local information including types of employers in the local area;
- vacancy information;
- information on pay scales in sectors;
- sector champions – not high achievers, but advocates and role models (these could include non-traditional entrants, or those who have overcome adversity);
- inside information or witness testimony (i.e. people conveying a sense of what their job feels like in real life) – this could include written vignettes, audio clips, film or pod casts;
- information on points of entry or transfer into a sector from another area, which would be helpful for inspiring job changers; and
- 'future proofing' – an indication of any major changes on the horizon (e.g. workforce remodelling).

Appendix 1

Protocol proforma

This checklist can be used as a self-assessment tool to gauge compliance and identify areas for development.

Category	Criteria	Self-assessment	Examples of best practice	Action needed
1. Ethical practice				
1.1	Ethical conduct has been followed in the collation of LMI (i.e. information has been collected with the full knowledge of its respondents, with informed consent where relevant).			
1.2	Methods used to disseminate the LMI ensure (so far as is possible) that certain groups of clients are not excluded (e.g. those without access to the internet).			
1.3	Presentational styles of LMI should adhere to guidelines on accessibility (e.g. appropriate for those who are visually impaired).			
1.4	The language used does not reinforce stereotypical assumptions.			
1.5	Language is devoid of sector specific interests.			

2. Provenance of data				
2.1	<i>How were data collected?</i>			
2.1.1	Producing a clear summary of the methodology used for the collection of data.			
2.1.2	Being clear about the 'source' of information.			
2.1.3	Any 'health warnings' on the interpretation of data.			
2.2	<i>Why and for what purposes were data collected?</i>			
2.2.1	Statement on the coverage and scope of data sources used.			
2.3	<i>When were data collected?</i>			
2.3.1	Clear specification of the period to which the data relates and how regularly data are updated and updateable.			
2.3.2	Collection and updating of same data at appropriate time intervals to enable comparisons to trend data, including explanations on discontinuities in time series.			
2.4	<i>Where were data collected from?</i>			
2.4.1	Provision of clear links to key data sources and signposting to other relevant information, including statement on the limitations on the categorisation used.			
2.4.2	Consistent use of disaggregated national data from 'official' sources (when making comparisons across SSCs).			

3. Data disaggregation				
3.1	<i>Data to be disaggregated by:</i>			
3.1.1	Industry/occupation – data disaggregated at an industry and/or occupational level using SIC and SOC classification schema in accordance with coverage and availability.			
3.1.2	Other classifications of particular pertinence to the guidance process (e.g. industry and occupational roles)			
3.1.3	Regional/sub-regional level – data disaggregated to regional and sub-regional data in accordance with availability.			
3.1.4	Dimensions of equality – data disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity and disability in accordance with availability.			
3.2	Being explicit about the categories (including sectors, occupational categories, geographical areas, etc) to which the data relates (and about any associated limitations for the purpose in hand).			
3.3	Note included to explain confidentiality constraints limit disaggregation of data sources.			

4. Service expectation				
4.1	<i>For LMI provided by SSCs to be useful to IAG practitioners, the following minimum requirements should be met, irrespective of the medium used for dissemination:</i>			
4.1.1	The role and remit of SSCs should be explained, in plain language, so that IAG practitioners can have confidence that they represent a reliable and trustworthy source.			
4.1.2	The overall offer of LMI services by each SSC should be clearly specified and effectively marketed (that is, SSCs should be explicit about exactly what LMI is being provided, through what media, and how often it will be updated etc.).			
4.1.3	A statement should be made to give IAG practitioners confidence that the SSC employees producing the LMI have the requisite skills and knowledge for information handling, interpretation and analysis.			
4.1.4	The LMI provided should have (as far as possible) the potential to be interpreted for use with all ages, abilities, genders, ethnicities, etc. and throughout all four home countries.			
4.1.5	LMI should be 'fit for purpose', with mechanisms in place for IAG practitioners to consult, where necessary.			

4.2	<i>For LMI disseminated through websites, the following guidelines will be helpful for providing practitioners with a high quality service for IAG:</i>	
4.2.1	easy navigation, with clear signposting (e.g. site map, A-Z) and an efficient search engine	
4.2.2	the use of understandable language, which is jargon free	
4.2.3	print friendly versions of downloadable documents (including high resolution images of charts)	
4.2.4	a point of contact – with an indication of how a query will be dealt with and within what timescale. Ideally, this should cover queries concerning data and other requests like how to locate speakers on sectors and work experience contacts	
4.3	<i>In terms of content, the following would be highly valued by IAG practitioners:</i>	
4.3.1	a section on the site dedicated to careers in the sector	
4.3.2	FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) reflecting topical issues	
4.3.3	case studies of different types of clients making their way in the sector (e.g. women returning to the labour market; graduate entrants; Apprentices)	
4.3.4	information on entry requirements, application processes (e.g. Apprenticeships), and especially wherever applications are centralised	
4.3.5	opportunities for progression	
4.3.6	information on ‘new’ job titles, skill levels, transferability of skills and career paths	

4.3.7	information on opportunities for adults changing career direction	
4.3.8	data on employment and labour market trends and forecasts	
4.3.9	qualifications – different types of qualifications needed/acceptable and approved courses (where these exist)	
4.3.10	local information including types of employers in the local area	
4.3.11	vacancy information	
4.3.12	information on pay scales in sectors	
4.3.13	sector champions	
4.3.14	inside information or witness testimony (i.e. people conveying a sense of what their job feels like in real life)	
4.3.15	information on points of entry or transfer into a sector from another area, which would be helpful for inspiring job changers	
4.3.16	'future proofing' – an indication of any major changes on the horizon (e.g. workforce remodelling)	

Appendix 2

Examples of inspiring, innovative or successful LMI formats identified by IAG practitioners

The section presents examples of how guidance practitioners use LMI and provides some examples of LMI they find inspiring, innovative or successful:

Example 1: Introducing LMI to clients – AGCAS sector briefings

The AGCAS sector briefings²⁶ produce top level information on trends in various sectors. These briefings are used with both undergraduate and postgraduate student to 'kick start' their understanding about a sector and where to find more information. The data introduces the idea of future job trends and prospects in the sector assisting clients thinking about what kind of future there is the sector. This LMI is free and directly available to clients. Sometimes, a practitioner will judge that is more appropriate to help the client access and understand the data (i.e. turning it to intelligence) in terms relevant to their context and circumstances.

Example 2: Understanding the role and remit of Sector Skills Councils

The LMI Learning Module²⁷ of the NGRF website is used with 2nd year career guidance undergraduates who found the idea of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) 'mind blowing'. Although SSCs can be accessed directly, they trusted the NGRF to take them on a guided tour of LMI as believed it to be accessible, understandable, up-to-date and impartial. This tour highlighted what users needed to look out for in terms of data, the unique offer in SSCs, but also highlighting other links and sources which could be used to build up comprehensive LMI understanding.

Example 3: Handling conflicting LMI and challenging assumptions

This example illustrates why practitioners need a good understanding of LMI from a variety of sources to be confident in their understanding of the labour market. Recently, there was a serious shortage of plumbers hyped up by fictional tales of individuals leaving high paid city jobs to retrain because financial rewards for plumbers were so great. However, the Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors (APHC, 2006²⁸) stated in a press release that there was now an 'excess of plumbers'. This case highlights: firstly, the way shifts in the labour market can occur rapidly; and secondly, the difficulty in judging the relative reliability of apparently conflicting LMI. In this instance,

²⁶ See for example:

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Explore_job_sectors/Social_care/overview/plXfeac

²⁷ Accessed at: <http://www.guidance-research.org/lmi-learning/practice/stakeholders>

²⁸ APHC (2006) Press Release 'There isn't a shortage of plumbers'. Accessed on 21 January 2006 from: <http://www.prnewswire.co.uk/cgi/news/release?id=161844>.

practitioners would seek further LMI from various trusted sources to gain a better understanding of the current labour market.

Example 4: Addressing issues of equal opportunities²⁹

This case illustrates the need for more detailed data on equal opportunities as its effective should be used to inform practice. For example, LMI that incorporates data on salaries might allow young women to consider the long term financial consequences of entering a stereotypical occupation such as hairdressing or childcare as opposed to more highly paid opportunities in traditionally male dominated areas such as construction. However, relaying this type of information is not sufficient to address inequality. Always assuming the individuals concerned are open to considering quite different opportunities, there is a need to work with clients to explore what (if any) challenges they may encounter if they choose to buck the gender stereotyping trend and find themselves working in, for example, a male dominated environment. In this instance, LMI supports clients make informed decisions about their future.

Example 5: Learning how to handle and access LMI

The LMI Learning Module³⁰ of the NGRF website is used with 2nd year career guidance undergraduates who were very nervous about handling labour market information. They really liked the humour and accessibility of this glossary/quiz and felt they learnt a lot – not least to go onto NOMIS with greater confidence. It helps to instil a *can-do* approach with regard to handling and accessing LMI.

Example 6: Using case studies in practice from Careersbox

Careersbox produces short films, commissioned by employers. These are freely accessible on the web for anyone to view (and by registering for free users can download these films to in practice). These films are useful for training career guidance practitioners and for practitioners working with clients either one-to-one or in a group. The films are promotional, and therefore partial, but their value is that these videos portray ‘real people’ talking unscripted about their jobs. In this sense, they are similar to case study examples of what it’s like to be employed in a particular job and/ or industry.

npower³¹: This video case study is used to illustrate the need for lifelong learning and upskilling in the current labour market. A mature worker at a Power Station talks about his own career development and asserts the ‘sky is the limit’. He then goes on to say that he is expected, by his employer, to have a career development plan and that his wife has been amazed that, at

²⁹ Example taken from: Bimrose, J., Marris, L., Barnes, S-A. and Mason, A. (2006) ‘Labour Market Information: Broadening horizons and connecting practitioners’, in Reid, H. and Bimrose, J. (eds.) *Constructing Futures IV: Transforming Career Guidance*. London: Institute for Career Guidance.

³⁰ Accessed at: http://www.guidance-research.org/lmi-learning/nature/glossary_quiz

³¹ Accessed at: http://www.careersbox.co.uk/video/npower_rus_mor.wvx

his age, he has had so much training from the company. He is also clearly very proud of the monumental scale of the power generation operation.

London Underground apprenticeship³²: A 'black girl' (her words) talks about being an apprentice on London Underground. Just by talking she makes so many key points illustrating: that an NVQ is 'stage not age' (so it can take 12-18 months, but at your pace); that apprentices are people who know what they are doing; and that personal attributes are part of the career choosing process (patience good for work in signals, handling people good for station management). She talks easily about being a 'black girl' and how that is just not a problem. The case study provides powerful messages about: widening access; boosting achievement; 'lucky breaks'; ICT; being from a Black Minority Ethnic group; and being a woman in the workplace.

³² Accessed at: http://www.careersbox.co.uk/video/lt_landy.wvx

Appendix 3

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