End Project Report:
New Subject Coding Scheme Project

The Project Board is invited to:
- Review and sign-off NSCS End Project Report.

Purpose

The aim of this report is to:
- Review actual project outcomes against those specified in the Project Brief.
- Evaluate project deliverables against the original objectives.
- Identify residual risks.
- Summarise lessons learned.

Project objectives

The New Subject Coding Scheme Project was commissioned by HEDIIP under the Standards and Understanding theme. The project aimed to develop a replacement for the Joint Academic Coding Scheme that met the needs of a broad group of stakeholders and reflected the diverse and dynamic nature of Higher Education in the twenty-first century.

The following objectives were specified in the New Subject Coding Scheme Request for Proposals:
- To define the HE sector requirements for a new subject coding scheme to replace JACS
- To develop a standard coding structure that meets the HE sector requirements
- To fully populate the new scheme with subject codes and descriptions and gain support for the new scheme through consultation
- To prepare an adoption plan and gain the support agreement of the project's key stakeholders
- To define a governance model for the on-going maintenance and development of the New Subject Coding Scheme.
- To develop a communication plan that: raises awareness of the new scheme and its benefits; enables appropriate stakeholders to participate in the project; and enables stakeholders to prepare their organisations for implementation.
- To develop a benefits case for the adoption of the new scheme
- To recommend an approach for standard/routine subject based analysis using the new subject coding scheme

Project delivery

The project was delivered by a team from Cetis with sub-contracting partners from APS Ltd and Aspire Ltd, comprising: Paul Hollins (senior supplier), Adam Cooper (project manager) , Wilbert Kraan, Phil Barker, Gill Ferrell, Alan Paull, Charlie Paull, and Jennifer Denton.

The project was conceived in two stages. Stage 1, which ran from late May 2014 to the end of September 2014, was concerned with requirements gathering and impact analysis and delivered project deliverables PD01 and PD02 (combined). Stage 2, which continued until the end of October 2015, developed the subject coding scheme and proposals for subject based analysis, governance, and adoption, which comprise project deliverables PD03 to PD07.

Both stages 1 and two involved consultation with diverse stakeholders. Stage 1 focussed on targeted personal contact and workshops, engaging both representatives of significant sector bodies and individual HE Providers. Stage 2 consultations also involved an extended period of open public consultation from February to May 2015. Stage 2 consultations involved the publication of draft documents detailing the scheme itself, governance

proposals, and an outline adoption plan. An online system was made available to allow stakeholders to review the draft coding scheme and to comment on the terms.

The project was overseen by a Project Board made up of:

Andy Youell, Director, HEDIIP
Dan Cook, Head of Collections Development, HESA
Dr Christine Couper, Director of Strategic Planning, Greenwich University
Hannah Falvey, Head of Statistics, HEFCW
Lesley Donnithorne, HR Manager (Systems, Information and Grading), UWE Bristol
Mike Spink, Data Architect, UCAS
Paul Baron, Programme Manager, HEDIIP
Jenni Cockram, Programme Officer, HEDIIP

Resources and milestones

The NSCS Project was procured on a fixed price basis.

Stage 1

Ref	Key Product/ Deliverable	Planned Date	Actual date
PD01	Requirements Definition	**2014-09-30**	**2014-09-26**
PD02	Impact Assessment	**2014-09-30**	**2014-09-26**

Stage 1 was completed on time and at the planned budget.

Stage 2

Ref	Key Product/ Deliverable	Planned Date	Actual date
PD03	Draft scheme	**2015-01-31**	**2015-02-18**
PD04	Final scheme	**2015-06-30**	**2015-11-30**
PD05	Report on Subject Based Analysis and Text Mining	**2015-06-30**	**2015-11-30**
PD06	Governance Model	**2015-08-31**	**2015-11-30**
PD07	Adoption Plan	**2015-08-31**	**2015-11-30**

Stage 2 was delayed by staffing issues in the early summer, which were reported in the fortnightly Highlight Reports. More resource than anticipated was required to develop the new coding scheme and to gain the necessary support of stakeholders. These factors conspired to delay delivery and the latter to cause more than 20 days of additional effort to be required, the cost of which has been absorbed by the contractor. PD04 and PD05 were also held back, compared to the original delivery date, as the PMO and contractor agreed that reviewers needed to see the full picture to be able to comment properly on any part.

Ongoing risks

The completion of Stage 2 of the NSCS Project marks the end of Cetis' contracted engagement. Risks identified during the project which have residual relevance to the process of moving to adoption are:

R_CETIS_010 - Negative reaction against NSCS by HEPs because of a perception that the costs of an un-asked for change are imposed on them, with little or no benefits in return.

R_CETIS_13 - Queries regarding validity of report findings, raised after report has been submitted and approved, and new data brought to light.

Lessons Learned

Key lessons learned relate to both the process and practicality of developing HECoS. Although they arose in connection with a subject classification scheme, they are directly applicable to the development of other common code lists and plausibly also to agreeing common definitions of any kind.

Under-estimation of effort

The effort required to review and document actions against existing JACS3 codes as HECoS was initially populated, and to record additions and changes as it developed, was substantially under-estimated. The project team considers that it was appropriate to spend the time leaving a historical record, both as a matter of good practice for the technical work and for transparency and audit. Hence we suggest that more effort should have been allowed for, as opposed to a more light-touch approach being used. It may also be useful for project specifications to include expectations for this kind of record-keeping, even when it will not be a *published* deliverable.

Consensus over criteria

Although it is certainly necessary to make a draft version of coding schemes available for review, and to adopt an iterative process of development, we conclude that greater effort should have been spent on gaining consensus on criteria for term inclusion or exclusion before drafting. Neither the work specification nor the contractor's workplan made adequate allowance for this aspect. While criteria were provided as part of the report on the draft scheme, this was probably too late, and no provision was made for formalising acceptance of the criteria. The point here is not to enshrine criteria and eschew flexibility, but to provide a more robust basis for detailed work.

Handover and follow on actions

PD07, the proposed adoption plan, indicates scope for knowledge transfer from the Cetis team, as well as an extensive list of follow-on actions for HECoS adoption in general.

Footnote

The new coding scheme is referred to as HECoS – the Higher Education Classification of Subjects.