

## **SMS inaugural workshop 27 March 2015**

### **Mercy Conference Centre, Wellington.**

The Ministry of Education invited expressions of interest in an initiative to consider the ongoing strategy and use of Student Management Systems (SMS). All who expressed interest were invited to the inaugural workshop. Attendees included representatives from primary, intermediate, area and secondary schools in the North and South Island, a representative from Auckland University, SMS vendors and educational and technical consultants. The workshop was arranged by the Digital Era Learning Teaching & Assessment team (DELTA), which will manage the ongoing SMS initiative.

### **Working groups.**

There were two working group sessions at the workshop.

#### **Session 1: three groups discussed SMS pain points and priorities.**

Feedback from the groups was as follows:

**Group A.** One unanimous recommendation - one centralised cloud based SMS with APIs to allow vendors to add valuable functionality. That this facility be the responsibility of an N4L type independent entity.

**Group B.** This group endorsed Group A's recommendation. Additional comments were: it's got to be efficient: we must have access to data when we need it: the current myriad of systems is causing issues in terms of our professional work; the richness of storing student information in one accessible area.

**Group C:** Not necessarily one model (one SMS). The data has to transfer easily and has to be live between the schools somehow; it should be a three-way street, with schools, caregivers and students involved; trust issues, such as Ministry access to live data must be resolved; need to discuss the issue of how data moves easily between schools if there are different SMSs. There are two batches of data - SMS core and SMS value added.

**Session 2.** Three groups discussed two core problems.

#### **First problem: No common understanding of approach to what student data is captured and how to capture it.**

Causes the following pain points:

- Limits the movement of data between systems and schools
- Limits learner data moving with the student
- School's access to core student data for analysis and reporting

- Ongoing training for staff using systems that capture the data
- The number of different systems the same data is entered into
- No standard templates for any business process

### **Group feedback.**

1. Main problem is the transition of data between schools, different formats, SMSs not talking to each other. Affects other agencies schools will be talking with. There are big issues about access. Fix: common SMS, one set of protocols for data, demographics and achievement data. Some common formats - didn't want to limit to student achievement data. Suggested a common repository for data and a health service model where, when patients change doctor, a doctor can access all data.
2. Affects the day to day business, the doubling up, no transfer of data, secondary tertiary students going to new providers with no transfer of data to them. Fix: Central SMS that carries the fundamental core student data that can be drawn upon when required.
3. Difficulties of getting the information transferred affects students and caregivers, with impact on the teaching and learning programme. Do the office staff actually understand the process and protocols and know what information needs to go to the teacher? They may be gathering data for us but not knowing what to share. Fix: a common core of shared data, cloud based. It doesn't follow the student. We get access to where the data is, and we can immediately access it on enrolment, rather than the data moving.

### **Second problem: No business operational model including the work the Ministry has in progress or on the roadmap with SMS vendors**

Causes the following pain points:

- Lack of visibility to the SMS providers and the education sector of the Ministry's future direction in the SMS space
- No united voice to influence SMS systems to keep pace with changes happening in the education sector
- No clear common understanding of the Ministry's 'stewardship role' leading to misunderstanding in the education sector

### **Group Feedback:**

- a. How do we actually compare data if there is no common business approach to it? If there is going to be a big vendor/system change we will need training. Educational training, resourcing, who is going to pay? We have good working relationship with our vendor currently are we going to have good relationships with a new vendor? Capability and maintaining it - about finance. Can we split the business model into two parts. In the next six months can we decide what the vision is and then move into design after that so not in a holding pattern.
  
- b. Overarching problem is that there isn't a coherent vision or direction so there is no roadmap for DELTA and its component parts one of which is the SMS. We don't think there is a mechanism whereby the sector can sustain an ongoing discussion with the Ministry that will develop an agreed DELTA roadmap and without that we are tending to find incredible frustration (not just about SMS) as we schools, vendors, and the MoE are working on their own. All tackling the same problem, wanting the same outcomes, but working in a disparate way. SMSs struggle to support existing often competing needs and multiple demands. Schools, vendors, and MoE are acting as individuals incurring costs, there are inefficiencies starting to stifle innovation. Propose sector-wide conversation and consensus around DELTA and future-focussed learning. A series of coherent roadmaps, and plans to implement them that align with best practice. There is ongoing monitoring and review of progress.
  
- c. Inefficiencies. Time we spend gathering information for other people, not being able to gather the data when we need it because it's not operated in the right way or we don't know the right way to operate it because we haven't enough training to use the functionality of it. Affects the whole school community, whether school leaders struggling because they didn't have the information they need or struggling to support the teachers in what they need. Possible suggestion is looking at an N4L model for data management and the Ministry providing some TAG funding for a data leader within schools.