



INFORMATION MANAGEMENT: The Becta Vocabulary Strategy Case

Becta tasked Vantaggio with undertaking a wide scale research study into the use and values of controlled vocabularies in the Education and Children's Services sector. Other public and private sectors organisations were also investigated to provide a means for comparison. Controlled vocabularies were, and still are, regarded through the mists of conflicting opinions. But more urgently, it had been recognised that even within the confines of one single department (education and families), hundreds of individual vocabularies were and still are being used. This study sought to shed some much needed light on the landscape, and to make recommendations for a more pragmatic approach in the future.

Approach

The research adopted a mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) approach, gathering data through interview and literature research. A form of discourse analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data, while descriptive statistics were used to analyse and present the quantitative data. It was originally our intention to use inferential statistics methods (e.g. Pearson's "r") to identify any correlation of interest. However the data gathered proved too rich and variable to support this method.

Participants were senior personnel within the target sectors, selected on the basis of job role and / or knowledge and / or experience in the field of information management and vocabularies. All interviews were anonymised, and participants were requested to sign a "Permissions Form". The quantitative data were used to provide the evidence in support of the study's hypotheses while the qualitative data were used to provide depth and meaning to underpin this, as well as providing an unpicking of the underlying issues. The study was led by Lesley, and supported by two expert information management colleagues, with all three contributing to the research and report. In effect, this meant that the report is based on multiple sets of data all of which had to be analysed and interpreted using a precise method to ensure consistency.

The audience for this report were policy makers within Becta and the Department for Education's Information Standards Board Special Interest Group for Controlled Vocabularies, as well as all contributing organisations. This was the first investigation of controlled vocabularies used in the education sector on this scale.