**Handy Hints for managing school data**

This document is intended for the SAM or data entry manager in a school.

**Use the SMS to store all achievement data**

Establish a school-wide policy that all achievement data is stored on the SMS. Too often we found many pockets of data around the school, none of which could be accessed to create a comprehensive academic profile for any given student. Departing staff often means departing data too.

**Always use and retain the student’s unique ID**

Accurate data matching can be done fairly easily electronically, but this requires the use of a unique ID for each student. When downloading a list of students to record achievement data, or saving the Tabular Report of an e-asTTle assessment, always include and retain the student ID or NSN in the saved record.

**Store all original data files in a data archive file**

Data uploaded in to the SMS often updates a student’s status, but does not retain the actual data entered. Level 1 credits obtained this year are usually added to and over-write the Level 1 credits from last year, so the actual number of credits earned last year are “lost”. Retaining the original files in an archive file helps when you wish to analyse the number of Level 1 credits obtained in a given year.

**Check data for integrity**

Make sure that the data that are entered in the SMS match the original data file – transfer errors are possible. Also, are they valid values? A PAT stanine entry of 19 in the SMS is probably a typographical error for 1 or 9, which are worlds apart in terms of that student’s achievement.

**Avoid missing data**

To build a comprehensive academic profile for a student, you will need as much achievement data about that student as you can possibly obtain. Follow up on students who are absent for assessments, and make sure that all completed assessments are marked and recorded. It was not unusual for us to see an e-asTTle assessment assigned to 301 students, of whom 256 had completed the test, but the number of marked assessments was 238. This meant that a fifth of this cohort did not have results for that assessment. If possible, seek achievement data from a student’s previous school to help complete their academic profile, and be prepared to share your data with other schools when a student leaves your school.

**Changing the school’s SMS is a time for carefully planned change management**

A number of secondary schools have recently been faced with the option of changing their SMS as a result of one provider moving their operations off-shore. In the absence of on-the-ground support, many of these schools have chosen to switch to a New Zealand based provider.

This change requires careful planning to ensure that all records are successfully migrated from the old system to the new, and that all of the staff who use the system have adequate and timely training to make the best use of the new SMS. This requires a clearly articulated change management plan, which includes widespread consultation to ensure that all aspects of the change are considered and are able to be addressed.