

Take2 Newsletter

Take 2

from Meta Office

December 2005

Version 8 Certification and Release

Take2 version 8 is being submitted this week for certification by the Ministry of Education. We hope that certification will be complete by Christmas. This is great news and the Ministry is to be warmly applauded for bringing the certification process forwards. Good work!

So, assuming that version 8 is certified, that brings us to the question of when to release it. There are a couple of factors that influence this decision:

- The TEC Electronic Receipting System Project (ERS).
- The implementation of the National Student Index XML interface.

Electronic Receipting Project

If you don't have TOPS or Youth Trainees you don't need to bother with this paragraph. If you do have such trainees, read on and weep.

You will recall that we sent out a separate update about this project on 24 November. Since then we have had a meeting with TEC and been told that the specification previously promised for "late November" may not now be forthcoming for several weeks. Apparently there are "problems with testing".

In practice this means we won't be able to start programming until the New Year (assuming that "several weeks" does not turn into several months). This in turn means that we will not be able to deliver ERS functionality until well into 2006, probably not until April. It certainly won't be in the first release of version 8.

In the meantime, then, you will need to keep on making paper-based returns.

National Student Index XML Interface

Version 8 will contain the XML interface to the National Student Index. This is required because the COM interface, used by Take2 until now, is being phased out by the Ministry next year.

From the user's point of view there is no significant difference in the appearance and functionality between the XML and COM interfaces. You will see the same boring grey screens. Indeed the only difference at all is that we have added a couple of fields to tell you

when an NSI record was created and the code of the organisation that did the creating; a feature that will be helpful when handling students with common names.

The XML interface will be subject to Ministry certification and, of course, version 8 will not be released until it is certified.

Common sense suggests, then, that the new interface should have no major impact on you. Sorry – this is not the case. The Ministry of Education has stated that when you move to the XML interface you must again go through the integration testing process. This requires you to contact the NSI Unit, arrange a date for testing, and then carry out the testing before you can use the live interface.

We know that there have already been delays in the Ministry's testing regime over the last few months, so we imagine that when all the Take2 users need to test in early 2006 there may be a bit of a backlog – unless the Ministry has hired and trained more staff.

Expected Release Date

So we figure it might be a good idea to try and spread the testing load by releasing version 8 as soon as possible in the New Year meaning that users have three or four months to implement the new version and complete their NSI testing before the April SDR.

In summary, then, we aim to release version 8 in January. This will be a major update and so the usual upgrade options will be available: download from our web site, new installation CD, or a visit from a member of the support team.

Later as ERS becomes available we will release a minor update, which will require you only to download a new front-end from our web site.

We're not quite sure what it is, but it has been assessed as strategically relevant.



Take2 Newsletter

From Now til 31 January

It's hard to overlook the fact that Christmas is upon us. This means holidays for most of us and Meta Office is no exception.

On Friday 16 December we are knocking off work at lunchtime to have our Christmas lunch. The Help Desk phones won't be answered but you will be able to leave a message. If you are really desperate, ring 027 4499-187 and we will drag Richard T away from the turkey or from his chess game (there is a grudge match between Richard T, representing the support team, and John, representing the developers. Odds are currently running 3 to 1 in favour of Richard, who is in training and has foresworn his daily intake of four bottles of "V" until the match is over.)

Apart from this break, however, the Help Desk will operate on all working days though, truth be told, we don't expect that many calls on 28 December and those that we do get will be diverted to a mobile.

Please note that Monday 23 January is a public holiday in Wellington.

Please remember also that you have to submit your final SDR for the 2005 year not later than 31 January 2006. If you have time to do a trial SDR between now and Christmas, it would be a good thing to do.

Strategic Relevance

It was interesting to read Max Kerr's letter of 25 November about the second round of the PTE ASR Review. In the letter he mentions that using existing SDR data could streamline the process. Further enquiry with TEC reveals that the particular data item to be drawn from the SDR is the qualification completion record.

It's hard to see how this could be justified as a reliable and useful measure. Many providers never know whether their students complete qualifications. It is the very basis of the NQF that students can acquire credits towards a single

qualification from many providers and from ITOs.

The other issue is that the proposal shows a focus on academic completion. What about looking at student's prior activity (also in the SDR data set)?

We speculated in last month's Newsletter that TEC would start to focus on outcomes and ignore entry data. Sadly it looks like they have already started down that track, which might work for universities but surely doesn't for vocational training.

User Forum

In our last Newsletter we floated the idea of a user forum. It would be a bit of an overstatement to say that the idea was greeted by widespread interest – only three people came back to us. So it doesn't look like there will be a user group meeting in Fiji next year.

But one of the people who did come back to us suggested setting up an on-line forum – a web site where users could go and leave messages about *Take2* or, indeed, about wider issues such as dealing with government agencies, finding staff, etc.

Would any of you have interest in an on-line forum?

Seasons Greetings!

All of us here at Meta Office wish all of you all the best for the holidays and for 2006.

We want to thank those of our clients who have used *Take2* for years for continuing to do so, and to welcome all those new clients who have signed up in 2005. You are all appreciated.

