

Record of Meeting 13 August 2008
Audit Room

Present: Gareth Jenkins
Alan Holmes
Steven Meek
Penny Thomas
By phone: Pete Sewell

The meeting was called to discuss the issue of errors produced by riposte as described in PEAKs PC0152376, PC 0152421, PC0155120 and PC0158102 and KEL D5628Q in relation to the validity and integrity of data provided to POL under the ARQ agreement.

Gareth Jenkins explained the issue as described in the PEAKs and KEL listed above. An EOD process (CABSProcess) was being run between 1900 and 2000 hours, and at the same time the user was performing a balancing process on the gateway PC. During the EOD operation the CABSProcess created a 'lock' on the messagestore during which time (30 seconds) causing any other message writes to wait, subject to a 10 second timeout, until the lock was released. The balancing operation attempted to write messages to the messagestore but this operation timed out and the messages were discarded. Due to a deficiency in the implementation of the counter code the end user was not informed of the failure and the transaction (the balancing operation) appeared to complete successfully.

When this type of error happens Riposte records an event to the event log. It was said that this type of error could happen with any type of transaction.

Also highlighted in the meeting was the statement contained in PC0152376, written by Gerald Barnes,:-

'The fact that EPOSS code is not resilient to errors is endemic. There seems little point fixing it in this one particular case because there will be many others to catch you out. For example when I tried to balance with CABSProcess running I found that declaring cash failed with the same sort of error message!'

When this error condition occurs, the message is discarded and no gap is left in the message sequence numbers. The messages that fail to be written represent auditable events/transactions and this throws the credibility of the message sequence number check used to prove the integrity of data provided to POL under the ARQ service. The question is, should any of these errant messages have been included in data returns and under what other circumstances could this type of failure arise?

The discussion then focused on the way forward. It was agreed that we needed to understand what types of transactions had been subject to this error. To do this we needed to retrieve all of Event Logs, filter the riposte error messages, and analyse what was found. Only Event logs from 8 January 2003 have been retained due to a previous retention agreement with POL.

At the same time we needed to consolidate all of the ARQ outlet and timeframe data requests into a single excel spreadsheet so that ultimately any relevant errors found in the Event logs above, could be compared to ARQ data provided to POL for litigation purposes to confirm the integrity of the data provided. This exercise can only be carried out from 8 January 2003 as prior to this date Event log audit data was only retained for 18 months.

We cannot provide any further ARQs until this exercise is complete as the audit server is being fully utilised retrieving the 5.5 years worth of Event log data. We must question whether it is advisable to provide further ARQ data or witness statements until we have a process in place to fully validate our returns.

It was agreed that the process of retrieving all of the available Event logs would be carried out and this would start immediately. A sample would be provided to Steven to review. Also, the consolidation of the ARQ records would commence.

At the same time Steven would identify which messages we needed to focus on and write the necessary code to analyse the event data.

We also need to consider how we introduce an appropriate process going forward.

Penny Thomas
14 August 2008