

REVIEW OF POST-16 LEARNER STATISTICAL FIRST RELEASES: ACTION PLAN

In September 2007, PricewaterhouseCoopers was commissioned by Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) and Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) to review ten Statistical First Releases (SFRs) relating to post-16 learning.

The review was instigated in response to:

- i) Frustration with the slow rate at which SFRs (those published by the LSC in particular) had historically responded to changes in strategic policy direction
- ii) Concerns that the early participation numbers SFR published by the LSC did not accurately reflect the final rate of change in learner volumes, although it was sometimes used as if it did.
- iii) A general sense that a more holistic picture of 16+ learning and achievement could and should be presented in the suite of SFRs (in particular those produced by DIUS and LSC) than is currently the case.

In addition, it is good practice to review National Statistics products at least once every five years.

The objectives for the review were to:

- Identify any overall gaps in the SFR suite, as well as areas where there are concerns about consistency of reporting similar material in different publications;
- Consider the timeliness of publications and how well the content and presentation of publications matches departmental objectives and reflects new policy developments such as the introduction to Train to Gain;
- Consider how government targets are reported on in the publications;
- Meet the needs of the wider statistical community and users, not just the needs of the Department/LSC;
- Give consideration to dropping or replacing existing publications, bringing together some existing publications to tell a coherent story on a specific issue as well as changing the content of existing publications;
- Take account of recent Machinery of Government changes;
- Take account of the need for independence; and
- Translate the results of the user consultations into a series of recommendations on the changes needed.

The review highlighted the following general themes, issues and problems:

- There is scope to increase the policy focus, relevance and context of SFRs, better aligning them to PSA targets and delivery plans, as the current suite of SFRs could be more effective in this area.

- There are gaps in the current SFRs, such as reporting on key PSA targets (Skills for Life and Apprenticeships) and more explicitly reporting on LSC Delivery Plan commitments which need to be addressed.
- The current suite of SFRs could be enhanced and complemented by other products (such as compendium publications) to tell a more coherent and holistic story about the Further Education Sector
- Steps need to be taken to ensure that new policy initiatives and measurement frameworks (such as Train to Gain, or the recommendation by the Apprenticeship review to measure performance primarily in terms of starts and completions) are included in the suite of SFRs at the earliest opportunity, in order that they remain policy relevant.
- A key feature of SFRs is to place statistics on the public record in order to inform debate and allow Parliament and the wider Public to hold the Government to account for the delivery of policy and expenditure of public funds. The frequency, content and presentation of the SFRs could be improved to better support their function.
- SFRs have not yet fully taken account of Machinery of Government changes.
- There is inconsistent presentation of statistics across SFRs – different geographies, age groups, ethnic groupings etc. Availability of lower level disaggregation of the statistics is patchy, and can be difficult to find. This needs to be addressed.
- Accessibility could be improved - generally, the SFRs are both difficult to find, and to understand given their complex nature.

To address the above issues, the review made 24 recommendations for changes to the suite of post-16 SFRs aimed at improving the way statistics relating to post-16 learning are presented.

Central to the DIUS/DCSF actions in response to this review are proposals to:

- i) Replace the three annual LSC SFRs on learner participation and learner outcomes and the DIUS SFR on Highest Qualifications with a single quarterly SFR which will contain headline statistics on learner participation and achievement, the highest level of qualifications held, and progress towards meeting key Government Targets in this area, drawing on information from both the Individual Learner Record and the Labour Force Survey
- ii) Supplement these quarterly SFRs with a number of more detailed annual compendium publications to be produced by the new Further Education Data Service with the content likely to include:
 - FE learners in England – describing the characteristics of FE learners
 - Resources in FE – giving a picture of both Government funding and staffing in English FE institutions

- FE Statistics – bringing together a range of statistics from various sources (such as the individual learner record and the LFS) to present a coherent picture of Further education in England
- iii) Charge the new FE Data Service with setting up an online dissemination portal that will enable users to access lower level (e.g. demographic and geographic) disaggregation of the data, and to do their own cross tabulations where the data supports this.
- iv) Further review the suite of 14-19 learner SFRs, not all of which were covered by this review, in light of recent Machinery of Government changes.

The review recommendations and plans for addressing them (who, what and by when) are listed in the attached table.

Rec no	Recommendation	Action	Lead Organisation	Supported by	Expected Completion Date
1	SFRs should clearly and more explicitly report progress against Public Service Agreement (PSA) Targets and reflect policy as in Delivery Plans, notably LSC Grant Letter plans. Reporting in this way will give a stronger link to policy context. But targets and plans change from year-to-year so a balance is needed between reporting on current targets/plans and retaining consistent time series.	<p>Building on the good progress in this area made in the recent learner outcomes SFR (May 2008) which placed statistics in the context of key policy areas/targets, analysts in the newly formed FE Data service, supported by colleagues in DIUS, DCSF and the LSC will review content of SFRs and ensure that relevant policies and targets are included.</p> <p>However, in doing so, care will be taken to ensure continuity of measurement as policies/targets change and, in particular, the provision of consistent time-series measuring performance across the wider system.</p> <p>If additional / new data is required to report on PSA targets, <i>the information authority</i> will lead on FE system consultation and defining data standards.</p>	FEDS	DIUS, LSC, <i>the information authority</i>	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months
2	Despite the need for an increased policy and target focus, it is important to maintain the integrity and independence of the SFRs, in line with the National Statistics code of	The National Statistics head of profession for DIUS/DCSF, who is also head of profession for the new FE data service and the LSC, will ensure that post-16 SFRs continue	DIUS/DCSF	FEDS, LSC	All SFRs are signed off as meeting statistics code of practice and protocols

	<p>practice and protocols, and to ensure that they continue to present a more general statistical overview of the sector.</p>	<p>to be published according to the National statistics Code of practice and associated protocols.</p> <p>On his behalf, DIUS/DCSF statisticians will work with colleagues in the FEDS and the LSC to ensure that SFRs continue to give a broad statistical overview of the sector, in particular the maintenance of consistent time series, in addition to focussing more strongly on Government priorities and targets</p>			<p>The revised set of SFRs to be released in the coming months will address this recommendation.</p>
3	<p>Fundamental gaps - where PSA Targets and Delivery Plans are not covered at all in any of the SFRs - should be addressed. In particular, to measure progress the Skills for Life PSA target</p>	<p>Building on the progress in this area made in the recent learner outcomes SFR (May 2008), which made reference to all relevant DIUS PSA (including information on apprenticeship completions and Skills for Life qualifications for the first time) and LSC delivery plan targets, the quarterly SFRs will report on progress against all relevant PSA and LSC delivery plan commitments. In particular, this will include reporting on the Skills for Life PSA target.</p> <p>If additional / new data is required to report on PSA targets, <i>the information authority</i> will lead on FE system consultation and defining</p>	FEDS, DCSF	DIUS, LSC, <i>the information authority</i>	<p>Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months</p>

		data standards.			
4	<p>Consideration should be given to collating and publishing all post-16 SFRs in one place. This should include consideration being given to the new FE Data Service producing a post-16 annual compendium containing data from all the SFRs, or the development of a post-16 section in the existing 'Education and Training Statistics for the UK</p>	<p>All post 16 SFRs will be published via the National Statistics Publication Hub, with links to all the SFRS provided on the FE data service website, and the joint DIUS/DCSF statistics and research gateway.</p> <p>The FE Data Service will be charged with the annual publication of several National Statistics compendium volumes bringing together information from across the post 19/FE sector. These are likely to include to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FE learners in England – describing the characteristics of FE learners - Resources in FE – giving a picture of both Government funding and staffing in English FE institutions - FE Statistics – bringing together a range of statistics from various sources (such as the individual learner record and the LFS) to present a coherent picture of Further Education in England 	FEDS	DCSF, DIUS, LSC, <i>the information authority</i>	<p>Joint publication issue addressed through the revised suite of SFRS released over the coming months</p> <p>By Dec 2009 (for publication of all compendium publications)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where data standards need to be harmonised to facilitate information collation, <i>the information authority</i> will lead the work with other data standards bodies. 			
5	SFRs should take figures from multiple data sources to present a more coherent story of 'flows' of learners and qualifications adding to the 'stock' of qualifications and skills. This particularly applies to SFR5 (The Level of Highest Qualifications held by Adults)	The FE data service will be charged with publishing a quarterly National Statistics First Release which will replace the 4 SFRs currently published by both the LSC (learner participation, both full year and early year, and learner attainment) and DIUS (highest qualifications), and which will bring together headline information from various sources, in particular both participation and attainment data from the ILR, figures derived from the LFS, and school sixth form data. It is likely that 'stock' figures from the LFS, will continue to be published annually as at present, and appear in the March edition of the quarterly SFR. <i>The information authority</i> will work with other data standards bodies to harmonise standards enabling easier comparison of data.	FEDS	DCSF, DIUS, LSC, <i>the information authority</i>	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months
6	However, whilst SFRs should strive to combine multiple data sources, a balance must be achieved between	The proposed timetable for the publication of quarterly SFRs (December, March, June, October)	FEDS	DCSF, DIUS, LSC	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months

	<p>timeliness and coherence. That is to say that SFR timetables will continue to be driven predominantly by the availability of key datasets, and that publication timetables should wait no more than a few weeks for up-to-date figures from other supporting sources, where it is judged that the benefit that their inclusion brings to the user justifies such a delay</p>	<p>dovetails neatly with current data collection timetables for both the ILR and the LFS and current SFR timetables.</p> <p>This means that users will get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - full academic year participation figures at no later than they do at present, and early provisional figures no later, and updated more frequently than at present - more frequent (quarterly) updates on apprenticeships and train to Gain starts and completions than they do at present (annually) - final academic year attainment figures (June) a couple of months later than they do at present, but this will be compensated for by the fact that qualification attainment information will be published on an ongoing basis, with an emerging picture published in March based on November ILR returns - LFS data more frequently, and no later than they do at present 			
7	LSC SFRs should paint a holistic and	By bringing together information	FEDS	DIUS, DCSF,	Addressed through the

	<p>coherent picture of the wider Further Education Sector. This should be widening the focus from Government funded learning to include other forms of learning where appropriate, and data is available. To this end, consideration should be given to making more use of data sourced from awarding bodies as a way of including qualifications funded from other sources.</p>	<p>from the current SFR suite into a single publication, the quarterly SFRs will provide a more holistic and coherent picture of the sector than they do at present. This will be complimented and enhanced by the proposed (annual) compendium publications.</p> <p>Information on non-LSC funded learning in FE colleges will be included if data quality supports this and consideration will be given to making better use of data from awarding bodies, in particular the inclusion of information in the compendium publications and quarterly SFRs from the current Vocational Qualifications and Key Skills SFRs</p> <p>If additional data is requested or quality needs to be improved, <i>the information authority</i> will lead on consultation and development of data standards.</p>		<p>LSC, <i>the information authority</i></p>	<p>revised set of SFRs released over the coming months</p> <p>Partially addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months Further covered by compendia by Dec 2009 (</p> <p>Where possible greater use of awarding body data will be incorporated in SFR and compendia</p>
8	<p>SFRs should quickly take account of, and include, both new policy initiatives and new measuring conventions (recent examples being Train to Gain, Diplomas and Apprenticeship starts and completions agreed through the</p>	<p>Statistics on Train to Gain and Apprentice and completions were included for the first time in the recent LSC learner outcomes SFR (may 2008), building o the previous inclusion of apprenticeship starts in the previous LSC SFRs on learner</p>	<p>DCSF FEDS DIUS, <i>the information authority</i></p>	<p>LSC</p>	<p>Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months.</p>

	Apprenticeship Review). Mechanisms (such as formal Memoranda of Understanding) should be put into place to ensure that this happens.	<p>participation.</p> <p>In future, statisticians in DIUS and DCSF will work closely with colleagues in FEDS and the LSC to ensure that new policy initiatives/learning programmes and measurement frameworks are incorporated into SFRs at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>If additional / new data is required to report on new policy initiatives etc., <i>the information authority</i> will lead on FE system consultation and defining data standards.</p>			
9	Analysts producing SFRs and their policy/delivery colleagues should commit to working more closely so that there is a wider understanding of, and engagement with, new policies, initiatives and measures	Analysts in DIUS and DCSF will look to strengthen and build on current links with policy colleagues, and will steer the work of the FE Data Service in order to ensure that Statistical Publications remain policy relevant	DIUS, DCSF,	FEDS, LSC, <i>the information authority</i>	Improved working arrangements have been put in place from September 2008 - ongoing
10	Whilst the structure and frequency of the DCSF SFRs were, in the main, felt to be fit for purpose by the user community, we recommend that DIUS and LSC should build on existing quarterly internal MI reports to develop quarterly SFRs, each covering the range of LSC funded learning (FE, WBL, TTG, etc) and both participation and achievement –	As previously detailed, the FE Data Service will be charged, in conjunction with colleagues in DIUS, DCSF and the LSC, with the development and publication of a quarterly SFR, which will replace the 3 LSC SFRs on learner participation and learner outcomes, and the DIUS SFR on highest level of adult attainment.	FEDS	DIUS, DCSF, LSC	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months

	including LFS data where possible.	<p>These quarterly SFRs will bring together the latest available headline information on the totality of LSC funded (and non funded where possible) learner participation and attainment from administrative (ILR) data, presented alongside statistics derived from the LFS, and will look to include information from awarding bodies in the longer term. These publications will also regularly report on progress towards all relevant PSA targets and LSC grant letter commitments.</p> <p>These SFRs will be published every quarter in the months of December, March, June and October.</p>			
11	Where possible, the LSC SFRs should not be so firmly linked to the FE collection timetable and should include participation and achievement data side by side rather than across different SFRs.	<p>As mentioned previously, the proposed timetable for the publication of quarterly SFRs dovetails neatly with current data collection timetables for both the ILR and the LFS.</p> <p>As detailed previously, participation and attainment data will both be included in the proposed quarterly SFRs.</p>	FEDS	DIUS, LSC, the information authority	<p>Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months</p> <p>Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

		If there are changes required in data collection timetables or specifications, the information authority would lead on FE system consultation and specification			
12	With more frequent LSC SFRs, there should be a clearer distinction between provisional and final data. If quality criteria are met, provisional data can be used but should be clearly marked as such – with final data being released at a subsequent and timely juncture thereafter where it is deemed appropriate and beneficial to do so	Using the quarterly SFRs, provisional data (from FE ILRs) will be included (and clearly marked as such) at the point which this is supported by the quality of available data. This provisional picture will then be updated on a quarterly basis until such time as final data for a particular academic year/data series becomes available.	FEDS, DCSF	DIUS	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months
13	SFRs should continue to be produced in as timely a fashion as is possible. Whilst the time taken for the compiler to produce the SFR on receiving data is generally no more than a few weeks, consideration could be given shortening the time it takes to the SFR compiler where it is possible and appropriate to do so. In support of this, DIUS, DCSF and LSC should initiate a review of collection, quality assurance and production processes of LSC SFRs to identify and implement improvements in timeliness (in	<p>The FE Information Authority are currently examining the potential for more timely reporting of attainment data.</p> <p>The FE data service will be charged with carrying out a review of collection and quality assurance processes with a view to improving quality and improving timeliness of data collection and dissemination.</p>	FEDS,	DIUS/DCSF, LSC, <i>the information authority</i>	<p>Sep 2008 (for IA work on attainment data)</p> <p>March 2009 (for FEDS review of collection and quality assurance processes)</p>

	particular, in relation to qualification attainment data).				
14	DIUS, DCSF and LSC should initiate work on options for more radical changes to the way that data on 14-19 year olds is covered in SFRs in light of recent Machinery of Government changes.	DCSF, supported by DIUS, LSC and FEDS will review the suite a of 14-19 SFRs (many of which were out of scope of this review) in light of recent Machinery of Government changes.	DCSF	DIUS, LSC, FEDS	Partially addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months Ongoing work to develop new releases and related downstream products to be completed over the coming year.
15	In recognition of the Machinery of Government changes, SFRs should include Young People/19+ splits throughout.	The current suite of SFRs all include analysis split by young people and 19+ learners, and this will continue	FEDS, DSCF	DIUS, LSC	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months
16	As SFRs become more focussed on PSA Targets and Delivery plans, and less single sourced, consideration should be given to dropping Key Skills and Vocational Qualifications SFRs, with information from them (particularly on non-government funded learning and achievements) being incorporated elsewhere in the new suite of SFRs.	DCSF agree that the current VQ and Key Skills publications no longer meet requirements. DCSF will continue to collect data on qualification achievements from Awarding Bodies, and will develop plans for new ways to publish this information from 2009. DIUS/FEDS will do the same for the quarterly post-19/FE suite of SFRs and associated compendium publications	DCSF, FEDS	DIUS, LSC	Complete with the publication of new suite of SFRs.
17	Improvements should be made to SFR titles, text and tables across the entire suite to make them clearer - plain English should be used	Text and table titles/content will be overhauled and be made simpler than they are at present. Table notes and definitions will be more	FEDS, DCSF	DIUS, LSC, <i>the information authority</i>	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months

	throughout.	comprehensive than they are at present in order to aid user understanding.			
18	Consistent demographic and learning breakdowns should be used across the SFRs where possible across the entire suite. Also, where possible, time series contained in the SFRs should be consistent in terms of length and years.	Current presentation will be reviewed and improved to ensure consistency of demographic and learning breakdowns. <i>The information authority</i> will work with other data standards bodies where harmonisation of data definitions etc. Is required, Quarterly SFRs will contain longer time-series of data than is the case at present.	FEDS DCSF	DIUS, LSC, <i>the information authority</i>	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months
19	Greater use should be made of maps and charts to aid understanding.	Greater use will be made of maps and charts than at present where it is appropriate to do so in order to aid user understanding of the statistics	FEDS, DCSF	DIUS, LSC	The revised set of SFRs released over the coming months
20	Every SFR should provide text and data for England. Where there is a policy reason and the data are available, text and data can be provided for the other UK countries, GB and UK. Where an SFR does not cover UK, links should be provided to sites where information on other nations and on the UK can be found.	All SFRs will clearly present information for England. Statisticians in the FE data service and DCSF will work together with colleagues in DIUS and the Devolved Administrations to either present figures for the UK where appropriate (possibly in the compendium publications) or include links to similar figures published by Devolved Administrations.	FEDS, DSCF	DIUS, LSC, Devolved Administrations	Addressed through the revised set of SFRs released over the coming months

21	Local data should be provided for each of the SFRs wherever possible (allowing for factors such as data robustness due to sampling variation). The likely volume of such local data if made available would normally require that the tables are provided as Additional Information rather than in the SFRs themselves.	The FE Data Service will be charged with the production of a dissemination portal which will allow users to disaggregate headline statistics to (the lowest available robust) local level and cross tabulate with other key demographic variable.	FEDS, DCSF	DIUS, LSC	The capability to provide further desegregations will be built up by the Data Service and released as supplementary data to the SFRs Requirements for key series will be address by no later than December 2009
22	The SFRs should primarily focus on the publication of headline statistics, with detailed breakdowns (e.g. demographic and geographic) being updated less frequently, and presented as a supplement to the SFRs as Additional Information, via a tabulation tool/dissemination portal or in a compendium publication. Spreadsheet versions of all tables within SFRs should also be made available.	The quarterly SFRs will focus primarily on publication of headline statistics. More detailed breakdowns will be made available both via the annual compendium publications to be published by the FE data service, and a dissemination portal, to be hosted by the FE data service, with the latter allowing users to carry out cross tabulations and lower level disaggregation of headline statistics along the lines of the of the HEDI tool currently employed by the Higher Education Data Service	FEDS, DCSF	DIUS, LSC	Addressed through the revised Set of SFRs released over the coming months.
23	When publishing SFRs and additional information, full use should be made of the new National Statistics publication hub.	All post-16 SFRs are already, and will continue to be published via the National Statistics publication hub	DCSF	DIUS, FEDS, LSC	Completed
24	DIUS should ensure that plans for the new FE Data Service include dissemination and publication of	The FE data service will be jointly responsible, together with DIUS and DCSF for the publication of post-16	DIUS	LSC	Completed

	SFRs.	SFRs, which will be either be published via, or have links to/from the FEDS website, the DIUS/DCSF research and statistics gateway, and the National Statistics Hub			
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