

About the Data Service

The Data Service was launched in April 2008 to collect and disseminate information as the first single source of data for the further education system. We will work closely with *the information authority* to streamline and improve the way information is collected and shared.

Funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and supported by the Learning and Skills Council at its inception, our new separately managed organisation will evolve into a service provider operating fully in the interests of the sector.

During 2008/09 we will begin working closely with providers to identify measures that will reduce the burden of data collection placed upon them. Using this information, incremental improvements will be delivered from 2008/09 relating to support, transparency, access and standards.

By 2011 the transformation will be complete and we will have a service that meets the needs of the FE sector as a whole.

Our launch forms an important part of Government reforms to improve efficiency and to reduce the burden placed upon education and training providers by streamlining the way information is collected, handled and shared throughout the education system.

We will work with and report to *the information authority*, which has been established through the reforms as an independent body to set and regulate data and collection standards for all organisations involved in further education and training in England.

The Data Service will have extensive reporting capability; using appropriate tools and technology to quality assure, store, publish and disseminate sector data. We will also offer dedicated support for customers which includes account management; a central service desk; and training for providers.

Through our governance arrangements, we aim to be an exemplar of progress towards sector self-management and sector self-governance.

The key principles of the Data Service are to eradicate duplication; improve collection and sharing; increase efficiency; assure quality; and provide new levels of customer service for further education.

Our governance

The governance of the Data Service will be led by the further education sector, with strategy and policy direction provided by a governance board comprising representatives from further education organisations and *the information authority*.

Data Service performance will be managed through operational level agreements with *the information authority* for core services and through service level agreements with individual stakeholders who require specific ad hoc information outside of that provided by the core catalogue.

The Data Service derives its authority to collect and disseminate information from existing Learning and Skills Council legal requirements until alternative arrangements are put in place.

National data sets for further education will be produced and published under the governance of and as an agent for the National Statistician.



Our services

The Data Service will deliver a central catalogue of core services to the further education sector through operational level agreements with *the information authority*.

We will also provide a self-financing ad hoc service outside of the central catalogue. These services will be delivered within an agreed governance framework.

The Data Service will be responsible for the central collection and storage of sector and sector-related data, providing a 'single version of the truth'.

We will undertake data transformations based upon published algorithms and will disseminate datasets to a publication schedule, agreed sector-wide by *the information authority*.

We will also deliver customer support through account management, education and training and managed service desk provision. Our services will include:

Direct collections from providers

The Data Service will undertake the collection of learner and funding data from providers within a quality and schedule framework set by *the information authority*.

Collections from intermediaries

The Data Service will obtain data relevant to further education organisations from other sections of the education system.

Data transformations

The Data Service will, among other services, apply derived variables as specified and agreed by *the information authority* to produce standard data sets.

Data dissemination

The Data Service will, over time, deliver a range of dissemination services, including data sets and reports. We will also work with *the information authority* to establish an agreed regime by which the specification and number of agreed datasets can be modified over time in response to sector business needs.

Regular publications

We will produce annual national publications covering a range of topics including further education sector provider performance and headline statistics.

Ad hoc services

The Data Service will deliver ad hoc services charged to all stakeholders possessing the appropriate data protection permissions for the information they require.

Customer support

We will supplement our service delivery with a support function that will include account management for key stakeholders; a centralised managed service for provider data support that will include a national service desk; and data training for providers.