



Office for
Statistics Regulation

Systemic Review Programme

Exploring the public value of statistics about post-16 education and skills in England

April 2019

Office for Statistics Regulation

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Executive summary

The Office for Statistics Regulation has been exploring the value of data and statistics in relation to post-16 education and skills in England.

Good quality and accessible information in this area is important to support the most fair, efficient and effective provision of education and training to meet the needs of both individuals and employers. This review explores the extent to which data and statistics in England meet this need and focusses on three main areas: further education and apprenticeships, higher education, and skills and lifelong learning.

We identified many areas where statistics and data services are being developed to meet a diverse range of user needs. For example, the Department for Education are improving their published statistics about further education and apprenticeships in response to identified user needs, and stakeholders spoke highly about the quality and value of data about many parts of the higher education system.

However, we found issues with access to learner-level data across all levels of study, and with the value of learner-level data from further education colleges. Our research highlights that better information about applicants to university would help shed light on social mobility. We also found that there are information gaps surrounding workforce skills, which make planning to meet future demand difficult.

Producer bodies have been taking steps to improve the accessibility, coherence and availability of data, but there is more still to do. We will monitor the improvements the producer bodies in England have committed to making in this area and support them to consider where there is more they can do.

In the next phase of our review we will be engaging with users and producers with a specific interest in statistics on this topic in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, to identify the extent to which the accessibility, coherence and data gaps are the same, or different, to those identified in England. We will publish an update on progress to this paper, alongside the findings of our UK-wide research.

Introducing the review

- 1.1. The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) is clear that statistics add value when they support society's need for information. In the Office for Statistics Regulation we have been exploring the value of data and statistics in relation to post-16 education and skills in England.
- 1.2. Good quality and accessible information in this area is important to support the most fair, efficient and effective provision of education and training to meet the needs of both individuals and employers. To understand the extent to which data and statistics in England meets this need, we launched our [review of the value of post-16 education and skills statistics](#) in 2018. This project was initiated as part of the Office for Statistics Regulation's [programme of Systemic Reviews](#). The programme aims to drive improvements in the value provided by statistics across the UK.
- 1.3. This paper highlights where we have found data provision is meeting user needs and celebrates where positive changes are in motion, as well as identifying where there is room for improvement. It does not aim to present a definitive picture but aims to start a conversation about priority areas for improvements.

'Value means that statistics and data...support understanding of important issues'
Code of Practice for Statistics

Our research finds many areas where statistics and data services are being developed to meet a diverse range of user needs. For example, the Department for Education (DfE) is improving its published statistics about further education and apprenticeships in response to identified user needs, and stakeholders spoke highly about the quality and value of data about many parts of the higher education system.

However, we found issues with access to learner-level data across all levels of study, and with the value of learner-level data from further education colleges, which has been developed to enable funding to flow, rather than to understand what students do. Our research highlights that better information about applicants to university would help shed light on social mobility. We also found that there are information gaps surrounding workforce skills, which make planning to meet future demand difficult. Producer bodies have been taking steps to improve the accessibility, coherence and availability of data, but there is more still to do.

- 1.4. To inform our research, we have spoken to 28 users of post-16 education and skills data, across 23 organisations. These users have included academic research teams, employer and employee representation bodies, charities, organisations funding research in this area, and those doing research in think tanks and government. In addition, we met with leads from the seven main statistics producer teams working in this area.
- 1.5. The post-16 education landscape in England is complex, which gives rise to issues with statistics which we explore in more detail in this paper. This paper explores the availability and value of data in three areas:
 - i. [Further education and apprenticeships](#) – focussed on those studying at organisations which primarily deliver further education and those studying for apprenticeships, regardless of the level of the courses taken.

- ii. [Higher education](#) – focussed on those studying at institutions which primarily deliver higher education, including universities, higher education colleges and private providers.
- iii. [Skills and lifelong learning](#) – focussed on the skill levels in England, and those studying for qualifications later in life.

1.6. For each of the three areas we ask:

- What are the big questions?
- What are the main sources of data?
- What is working well?
- What are the main issues?
- What improvement plans do producers have?

1.7. A summary of the sources of data identified through our research is provided in [Annex 1](#). It includes official statistics, Government funded surveys and record-level datasets.

1.8. Due to the variation and complexities of the post-16 education landscape in the UK, we have initially focussed on England. In April 2019, we will be extending the project to explore the public value of post-16 education and skills statistics across the UK.

Further education and apprenticeships

- 2.1. In this section we focus on the statistics and data which support understanding of those studying at further education institutions and those studying for apprenticeships, regardless of the level of study.

What are the big questions?

- 2.2. Researchers looking at the further education (FE) and apprenticeships space often start with questions around the numbers of students studying with different providers; what they are studying and their socio-demographics. We found lots of interest in the outcomes for those on different courses – whether they finish the course, what they do next and what they go on to earn – and the quality of provision. Answering these questions helps providers of FE and apprenticeships to understand what works and where there are gaps. There are questions around the impact of apprenticeship reforms on the quality of apprenticeships, the impact of the apprenticeship levy on the availability of funding for non-apprenticeship courses, and on the reasons why someone chooses one pathway over another.

What are the main sources of data?

- 2.3. The most cited data sets are:
- The Department for Education (DfE) aggregate outputs about FE and apprenticeships, including the Apprenticeships Levy
 - The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) which contains record-level data about the courses being taken in FE
 - The Labour Force Survey which provides information on the qualifications people have received, and how this relates to their working life
 - The National Client Caseload Information System, which contains local authority level data about young people's engagement in education and training
 - Ofsted aggregate data about the outcomes of FE inspections

What is working well?

- 2.4. DfE publishes a significant amount of data about apprenticeships and FE as official and National Statistics. Following a review of its statistics, DfE has streamlined its publications, and improved the signposting to the different statistical outputs it produces. DfE is continuously improving its outputs and has recently developed experimental data exploration tools and visualisations to enable users to explore data, including at local authority level. These outputs provide detailed aggregate information about those participating in FE and apprenticeships including apprenticeship starts, achievements, learner characteristics, level and subject

studied and employer characteristics. In [recent publications](#), DfE has responded to user needs to provide more comprehensive and useful data about apprenticeships.

- 2.5. Users, such as those in employment representation groups, find this data gives a useful overview of current apprenticeships' performance, whilst specialist, local and national media use the data to inform public debate, for example by explaining changes in the apprenticeships landscape in different sectors. Experienced users find the ILR to be a rich source of data, which enables research into a wide range of policy questions.

What are the main issues?

Accessibility

- 2.6. The ILR is primarily a mechanism for allocating funding to providers of FE and work-based learning. To support this funding process data about courses taken by learners, and information about the learners themselves, are collected and stored separately. As a result, stakeholders who had a good understanding of other individual-level datasets found the ILR data more difficult to conceptualise, access, and then analyse. Some users were not clear on the mechanism for accessing the ILR, and some have faced significant delays in receiving data. The format of the data, along with frequent policy changes, and limited documentation about the data for those carrying out analysis make it difficult for all but very experienced users to analyse without significant support, which is not always easy to access.
- 2.7. DfE paused access to all individual-level data in 2018 to review its data security arrangements and make improvements to how the data are accessed, which affected both the ILR and the National Pupil Database (NPD). Since September 2018 DfE has started to give access to data for research purposes via the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Secure Research Service. However technical issues with the roll-out of the new system means many users continue to face delays in receiving data (see [Annex 2](#) for more details). Researchers reported that they do not feel that DfE communicated this pause well and they did not know how or when they will be able to access data in the future.

Coherence

- 2.8. Some stakeholders are concerned about how ongoing reforms in technical education (for example [the introduction of T levels](#)) will be represented in data to ensure there is some comparability with previous qualifications.
- 2.9. Data about students studying for HE courses at FE colleges is not consistently held by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), making it very difficult to compare outcomes of students studying in different settings.
- 2.10. The historical context in terms of funding of FE has led to different and incoherent data sources for observing data for 16 to 18 year olds:
 - Information about pupils studying in school sixth forms are held in the NPD
 - Information about students studying in FE Colleges are held in the ILR

For example, the ILR does not hold the same level of detail about pupil ethnicity as the NPD, and the two datasets hold different measures about students with learning difficulties, with the NPD flagging those with Special Education Needs whilst the ILR holds self-identified records of those with a learning difficulty, disability or health problem.

Gaps

- 2.11. There is very limited data available about the FE workforce, making it difficult to analyse the quality and future capacity of the FE sector.
- 2.12. Official statistics currently published about apprenticeships can make it difficult to tell the full apprenticeship story, as information about new standards currently under development is not available.
- 2.13. Stakeholders spoke about limitations in the information available for pupils to enable them to make informed choices about post-16 education. Whilst this issue goes wider than the availability of relevant official statistics and data, in the higher education (HE) sector innovative presentations of data are being developed to lead the way in helping to inform choice, which is less apparent for FE and apprenticeships. Where information about apprenticeships is available, it is not possible for analysts to download the underlying information to enable analysis of the choices available.

What improvement plans do producers have?

- 2.14. DfE has published the results of a [Data Dissemination Discovery project](#), exploring the ways users would like to access data, and is starting to develop a data dissemination tool. It is possible this tool will go some way to meet the needs of some users, for example, those who want more bespoke analysis of apprenticeships data over and above the data already made available in aggregate and machine-readable form. DfE is addressing other issues such as introducing consistent house style for its releases and improved navigation to data which it has found to be the key barrier for FE users who frequently ask for data that is already published.
- 2.15. Following a review of person-level data shares by DfE it is modernising and standardising the way that data are shared with researchers. This review is also addressing the needs of the General Data Protection Regulation and finding a more sustainable balance between opposing user views on what should be shared and for what purpose. DfE's policy has always been to share its raw unit-level files, but for improved protection and consistency for users it is starting to make data from the NPD and the linked NPD (which incorporates the ILR and HESA data) available through ONS' Secure Research Service, although this has faced some delays (see [Annex 2](#) for details). The move to the Secure Research Service is likely to resolve some user concerns with access but will not alone make the ILR datasets easier to use for the less experienced analyst.
- 2.16. DfE told us about plans to consolidate its end-to-end data process. This is a significant programme of work but is aimed at rationalising the flows of data within their systems and providing better and more coherent data for its own analysts. One strand of this work will develop improved ILR datasets to make them easier to use for its own analysts. Such improvements will also make ILR-based data easier for less experienced analysts to use.
- 2.17. Data on the FE workforce is currently provided by the Education and Training Foundation via the Staff Individualised Record system. This system is voluntary for providers and response rates are variable, which can make it difficult to answer questions such as how lecturers' qualifications relate to field of teaching. DfE ran a Call for Evidence in 2018 to ask for views on what FE workforce data are currently collected, what might be needed, and how the sector thinks improvements could be achieved. Subsequently, [a consultation on next steps](#) was launched on 20 March 2019. To help address the data gaps in the short term, DfE has commissioned surveys. In late 2018 DfE published the results of the [College Staff Survey](#), covering teachers and leaders at general FE and specialist colleges. DfE has also

commissioned a further staff survey to cover other FE providers to enhance understanding of the wider sector.

- 2.18. DfE has continued to progress its use of Longitudinal Education Outcomes data which brings together education records and tax and benefits data to provide post-education employment outcomes. This has improved understanding of the flow of learners through the system and the impact on them many years after leaving. Within legal and ethical limits this source is extendable to incorporate other sources that could enrich understanding of learners' social mobility and what works – for example, linking to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings to help understand what industry sectors learners go into post formal and further education.
- 2.19. The [Office for Students \(OfS\) Data Strategy](#) sets out a commitment to work with HESA and DfE to ensure that data for all OfS registered providers is available from a single source and compiled with consistent definitions and quality standards. If achieved, this would help to make information about some students studying for HE qualifications in FE settings more comparable with those studying in HE settings.

Conclusion

- 2.20. Many of these issues have arisen because, in FE, data sources have been developed to enable funding to flow (rather than to understand what students do) and because FE policies have not been stable in recent years. In the past, there was a risk that limitations in the accessibility of data about the FE and apprenticeships system was impacting the development and improvement of some areas of system. In some cases, those with the power to develop new provision have not been able to make evidence-based decisions about what to offer and where, whilst those trying to assess the impact of provision did not have the data to be able to compare settings and establish what was working well and why. To help overcome these issues, DfE increased the amount of data it publishes and has improved the way it provides data to internal analysts and to some stakeholders – for example to Ofsted – to help analysts to understand its data and data limitations.
- 2.21. DfE's ongoing work to improve accessibility of data – both through development of an online data dissemination tool, and by working with ONS to flow its pupil data through the Secure Research Service – are likely to go some way to continue these improvements. However, better documentation and metadata about the ILR as a dataset for external users, support for researchers, and continued engagement with users of official statistics is required to ensure that the full potential of this data are met.

Higher education

- 3.1. This section focusses on the statistics which support understanding of those studying at higher education institutions, including universities, higher education colleges and private providers.

What are the big questions?

- 3.2. Researchers are interested in a wide range of aspects of Higher education (HE) including why people choose the providers that they do, the reasons why disadvantaged students are less likely to go to top universities and the factors that affect students experience, along with the impact of tuition fees. Universities are interested in using data to work out where they should focus their widening participation activities and assessing the impact of their programmes. The sector has questions around the factors that contribute to universities being awarded top awards in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and whether these awards impact on student choice. We also found interest in how to present information to help students to make informed decisions, the impact of unconditional university offers, and on the earnings premium of graduates.

What are the main sources of data?

- 3.3. We have identified:

- Information for students making decisions about attending university are available through the Unistats website, which includes data from the National Students Survey, statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Records, the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey and the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data, along with course entry information
- Researchers can request student-level data from HESA. However, to fully explore questions around widening participation, it is necessary to link this to National Pupil Dataset (NPD) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications data (see the accessibility section below)
- The Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey enable analysis of graduates' earnings and outcomes
- Student loans statistics from the Student Loans Company and Student Loan forecasts produced by the Department for Education (DfE)
- Other statistics in this area include statistics about participation rates and higher education staffing

What is working well?

- 3.4. The set-up of the HE system, which requires HE institutions and private providers to return data centrally to allow them to register and hence access public funding, means there are significant amounts of good quality data in this area.
- 3.5. The wide array of data and statistics published as official and National Statistics, research papers, and open datasets from HESA, UCAS, the Office for Students (OfS), DfE and the

Student Loans Company are crucial in informing public debate about HE. There have been improvements in many of the regular outputs in this area, with the OfS starting to publish key outputs such as the National Students Survey as official statistics, and HESA and UCAS making their summary statistics easier to interpret and access.

- 3.6. In HE, producer teams are reactive to evolving policy interest. For example, UCAS published information about the use of Unconditional Offers, DfE has published Student Loan Forecasts and ONS used HESA data to develop estimates of student suicides.
- 3.7. HESA's individual-level data are easier to access, and easier to use, than other individual-level student datasets. Those with an interest in high-level information about earnings, for example average earnings in a sector, find Longitudinal Education Outcomes data very helpful. DfE has made the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset available for research to some non-Government organisations, such as the Centre for Vocational Education Research, increasing the value of the data. However, to protect the sensitive data, DfE does not make it more widely available.

What are the main issues?

Accessibility

- 3.8. Researchers have found getting access to linked NPD, ILR and HESA datasets to be very slow. Data providers and researchers hope that the solution to give access to individual-level DfE data via the ONS Secure Research Service will improve this.
- 3.9. Some researchers spoke to us about difficulties with accessing linked NPD and UCAS individual-level data once they had secured approval to use the data. These delays have been caused by the closure of the Administrative Data Research Network and the difficulties with the role out of the ONS Secure Research Service (see [Annex 2](#) for details). In the past, researchers reported that UCAS did not provide enough support or guidance to help them interpret the data, making it difficult to analyse.

Coherence

- 3.10. UCAS use their own unique identifier to identify schools and colleges, which means that when researchers are able to access the data, it can be difficult to match up to other sources of information.
- 3.11. With multiple organisations in England producing official statistics and analysis about HE – including HESA, OfS, UCAS and DfE – there is a risk of confusion for users and inconsistencies in published data. For example, one user raised concerns that it is unclear why there are differences between undergraduate figures published by HESA and those published by OfS as part of TEF returns.

Gaps

- 3.12. Whilst our research has so far focussed on England, we have found that there are growing concerns about the impact of devolution on the availability and comparability of HE data. Due to policy differences across the UK, it has not been possible to develop a comparable deprivation metric for university applicants across the UK and as a result potentially useful metrics for individual countries have not been published. This is making it difficult to understand the backgrounds of students, and hence answer questions about social mobility.

- 3.13. The Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset brings together education data with information about individuals' salaries and the sectors that they work in. However, information about occupations is not available, meaning the success, or otherwise, of a given path of studying, cannot be fully analysed. There is ongoing development work looking to find a solution to this, for example with the development of the new HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey.
- 3.14. Due to small numbers and the complex nature of individual courses, HESA data are not broken down to course-level. OfS publishes some information about individual course through the Unistats website, however those wanting to understand the outcomes for a specific course are not always able to. In addition, there is not a single source of applicant data to all HE courses. UCAS cover all full-time undergraduate courses, but other courses, such as part-time and postgraduate courses are not consistently covered.
- 3.15. There is a need for more information about the wider benefits of HE – such as about student well-being. The Graduate Outcomes survey will help fill some of these gaps.

What improvement plans do producers have?

- 3.16. With the passing of the Higher Education and Research Act in 2017 and the formation of the OfS (now an official statistics producer) in April 2018, there is some flux in the Higher Education data landscape. The OfS has made HESA its designated data body, however the roles and responsibilities of each are still being worked through. Despite this, it is an exciting time in the world of HE data, with various ongoing projects focussed on meeting users' needs.
- 3.17. UCAS is improving its information systems, which will enable more flexibility in the information that it collects, and subsequently publishes. UCAS is developing a single data platform which will allow it to provide more, and more open, access to its data for approved purposes.
- 3.18. UCAS is also developing the way it presents information about universities to prospective students, to enable a more personalised experience. OfS has reviewed the Unistats website and is in the early stages of developing a replacement system based on user need. In addition, in December 2018 DfE announced the winners of an Open Data Competition to encourage tech companies and coders to develop new digital tools to help students pick the university course that is best for them. The winning companies are developing tools that have the potential to significantly improve the information available to students to make informed decisions. Organisations working in this area need to be mindful of the risk of duplication of effort, and of inconsistencies in the way information is presented which could cause confusion for users.
- 3.19. The Data Landscape Steering Group includes representation from many of the key HE data producers. Amongst other things, the group aims to oversee, and promote the use of, standard data definitions to reduce the burden of collections and to increase opportunities for data sharing. This should help to mitigate the risk of multiple Higher Education bodies publishing data.
- 3.20. Through the Data Futures project, HESA is aiming to increase the frequency of its data flows about students at universities, however the timeframe for delivery of this project is unclear. In addition, HESA is currently developing a new Graduate Outcomes survey as a replacement for the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey. These changes should improve the timeliness of data about HE and help to meet more users' information needs.

Conclusion

3.21. Our research suggests that there is an abundance of good quality data about the HE system, however getting access to this data and making the best use of it can be difficult. In addition, due to policy changes there is a growing risk of an increase of incoherence in the data landscape, both within England and across the UK. We would encourage producer bodies to continue to work to ensure each is clear on their roles and responsibilities and to improve the ease of access to data for approved purposes.

Skills and lifelong learning

4.1. In this section we focus on statistics which support understanding of workforce skills in England, and on information about those studying for qualifications later in life.

What are the big questions?

4.2. Researchers and employment representatives are interested in what skills employees have, what skills different sectors need and how this is changing. They want to know the challenges to finding, funding, retaining and retraining skilled workers, for specific sectors and to develop and deliver local and national industrial strategies. Our research found an interest in identifying hard to fill and skills shortages vacancies, for example, to inform decisions about whether specific occupations should be on the shortage occupation list (enabling greater migration of individuals with certain skills). Others want to know the average time and money spent on training in their industry and whether some groups can more easily access on-the-job training than others.

What are the main sources of data?

4.3. The source of data that stakeholders spoke about most often was:

- the Employer Skills Survey – until 2015 run by the UK Commission for Education and Skills, and now delivered by the Department for Education (DfE)

4.4. Other sources of information include:

- the Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- the Employer Perspectives Survey, DfE
- Further education (FE) Learners and Apprentices Survey, DfE
- the Apprenticeships Evaluation Learners survey and Apprenticeships Evaluation Employer survey, DfE
- the Skills and Employment Survey, Cardiff University – funded by Economic and Social Research Council, DfE and others
- the Adult Education Survey (previously the National Adult Learning Survey)
- longitudinal studies such the Next Steps Study and Understanding Society
- internal skills surveys run by employment representations groups

What is working well?

4.5. The Employer Skills Survey is regarded by stakeholders as a robust survey, with some long-standing questions enabling analysis of trends over time. It has a large sample size – around 90,000 employers – enabling analysis by sector and relatively small geographical areas. It

provides useful information about job related training, skills shortages and skills gaps through a rigorously designed survey. Users were pleased to see DfE commit to continuing the survey following the closures of UK Commission for Education and Skills, however, DfE's planned changes to the survey may mean it does not continue to meet all user needs.

4.6. Researchers are happy with the way they access longitudinal studies.

What are the main issues?

Accessibility

4.7. During spring 2018, stakeholders were concerned about when they would get access to the latest Employer Skills Survey. It was expected in June 2018 but multiple changes to the publication date meant it was not published until August 2018, which was not communicated to stakeholders. It was unclear to some whether, and if so how, they would be able to access the underlying data for further research. However, data are made available to authorised users through the UK Data Service.

Coherence

4.8. There were some concerns about the ability to link the Employer Skills Survey data to firm-level indicators, for example from ONS, due to differences in sampling frames. This can make it difficult to explore the link between training and firm outcomes, such as productivity.

4.9. There is inconsistency between the wording of questions between different surveys, for example around employee access to training, meaning it can be difficult to draw comparisons and get a coherent picture of skills gaps.

Gaps

4.10. For any survey, there is a tension between keeping questions consistent and adapting questions to explore issues in depth, whilst managing questionnaire length, response rates and delivering value for money. As a result, no single source can meet all users' needs. Some users felt that questions in the Employer Skills Survey do not go far enough to bring out differences between employers. For example, some are sceptical about the extent to which reported skills gaps genuinely reflect skills gaps within organisations, as some businesses are likely to desire staff with broader skillsets than are required. Others felt that the way questions are framed mean that skills deficiencies are not fully explored.

4.11. The Employer Skills Survey is designed to provide a consistent and comparable source of skills information by industry, occupation and geography. However, whilst the sample size of the Employer Skills Survey does allow analysis at local authority level, some users spoke about being unable to do detailed analysis at these lower-level geographies due to volatility in the data. Data from the Employer Skills Survey needs to be supplemented with a bottom-up identification of needs at the local-level, to enable Local Enterprise Partnerships and others to plan local training provision.

4.12. Stakeholders highlighted a gap in data about non-apprenticeships training – in particular, about training which is privately funded. This is making it difficult to get a complete picture of training provision and impact in England.

4.13. Some users expressed disappointment that some surveys had stopped – for example the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's (BEIS) Workplace Employment Relations Study which enabled a comparison of views of staff and managers, and the Skills for

Life survey, which provided information about levels of adult numeracy and literacy skills, as opposed to qualifications. BEIS are developing the Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey which should provide some of the information provided by the Workplace Employment Relations Study.

What improvement plans do producers have?

- 4.14. DfE is currently undertaking a review of its surveys in this area, which has drawn on a user consultation carried out by London Economics about DfE's main employer surveys. DfE is merging the Employer Skills Survey and Employer Perspectives Survey into one survey for increased efficiency and value for money. The new survey will be conducted every two years, with a larger sample size every four years (comparable with the Employer Skills Survey). There will be the large sample size in 2019, and a smaller sample (comparable with the Employer Perspectives Survey) in 2021. The 2021 survey will therefore provide key measures at a higher-level.
- 4.15. DfE is taking part in the 2021 OECD Survey of Adult Skills, the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. The survey measures adults' proficiency in key information-processing skills – literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments – and gathers data on how adults use their skills at home, at work and in the wider community. As with other surveys, DfE has had to make a choice about where to invest finite resource. The Survey of Adult Skills will enable comparability over time, and between countries, however with a smaller sample size than the Skills for Life Survey, this choice will impact the availability of local-level data.

Conclusion

- 4.16. The main sources of data relied on to understand skills are the ONS Labour Force Survey and surveys run or commissioned by DfE. These DfE surveys are not published as official statistics and external users of the data do not have the same prominence in the decision-making process about them as they do for DfE's official statistics outputs. Users are not necessarily informed or consulted about changes which may affect them. As the surveys in this area are more influenced by Government policy than other sources of official statistics, there is less clarity on whether, and when, they will run.
- 4.17. The currently available data does not give a full picture of the skill levels and in-work training provision in England, it does not provide information about numeracy and literacy levels, nor does it fully support planning of local or sector-level training provision. We would encourage DfE to improve how it communicates with users about the availability of statistics in this area and consider how the needs of external users can be met.

Next steps

- 5.1. We will continue to engage with users and producers of post-16 education and skills statistics. We will monitor the improvements the producer bodies in England have committed to making in this area and support them to consider where there is more they can do. We will speak further to stakeholders to understand the extent to which producer plans will meet their needs.
- 5.2. In addition, we will start engaging with users and producers with a specific interest in statistics on this topic in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, to identify the extent to which the accessibility, coherence and data gaps are the same, or different, to those identified in England. We will publish an update on progress to this paper, alongside the findings of our UK-wide research.
- 5.3. If you have any comments on this report, or would like to contribute to this research, please contact regulation@statistics.gov.uk

Annex 1: Data landscape summary

This table sets out the main sources of data about further education, higher education and skills in England:

- Official statistics were identified as part of an exercise to map all Children, Education and Skills statistics in the UK
- Other sources of information have been identified through stakeholder engagement and online research.

Broad topic	Official statistics	Other sources of data
Further education and apprenticeships	<p>Department for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FE and Skills • FE Data Library • FE Choices Learner Satisfaction Survey • National Achievement Rates Tables • Apprenticeships and traineeships • Apprenticeship and levy statistics • FE for benefit claimants • Education and Training statistics for the UK • Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics • Participation estimates for 16-18 year olds • Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people aged 19 • Performance tables • Statistics: destinations of KS4 and KS5 pupils • Further education outcome-based success measures • Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25 • Education and training statistics for the UK <p>Ofsted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FE and skills inspections and outcomes <p>Students Loans Company:</p>	<p>Record level data</p> <p>Department for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Pupil Database • National Client Caseload Information System • Longitudinal Education Outcomes data • Individualised Learner Record <p>Government funded surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour Force Survey • Census <p>Department for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apprenticeships Evaluation Employer Survey • Apprenticeships Evaluation Learners Survey • FE Learners and Apprentices Survey

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced learner loans paid in England 	
Higher education	<p>Department for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduate labour market statistics Graduate outcomes (from Longitudinal Education Outcomes) Participation rates in HE for England Widening participation in HE UK revenue from education related exports and Trans-national Education activity Student Loan Forecasts Education and training statistics for the UK <p>Higher Education Statistics Agency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HE Student Statistics: UK HE Student Statistics: Alternative Providers HE Leavers Statistics HE: destinations of leavers from alternative providers UK Performance Indicators HE Staff Statistics <p>Office for Students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Student Survey Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework metrics Equality and diversity data about students HESES and HEIFES survey data Medical and dental Intake Release of Unistats Annual Transparent Approach to Costing data on income and costs <p>Student Loans Company:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student support for higher education in England Student loans in England <p>Home Office & ONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home Office & ONS Immigration Statistics 	<p>Record level data</p> <p>Higher Education Statistics Agency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> student record staff record <p>Department for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longitudinal Education Outcomes data Individualised Learner Record <p>UCAS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University applications offers and acceptances <p>Government funded surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labour Force Survey Census

<p>Skills and lifelong learning</p>	<p>Department for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in education, training and employment: 16 to 18 <p>Office for National Statistics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people not in education, employment or training, UK • Labour Force Survey • Census <p>Ofqual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational and Other Qualifications Quarterly • Annual qualifications market report 	<p>Government funded surveys, Department for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer Skills Survey • Employer Perspectives Survey • FE Learners and Apprentices Survey <p>Consortium funded surveys, Cardiff University:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and Employment Survey • Adult Participation in Learning Survey <p>International surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OECD Survey of Adults skills • Eurostat Continuing Vocational Training Survey • Adult Education Survey <p>Longitudinal cohort studies, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, UCL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millennium Cohort Study • 1970 British Cohort Study • 1958 Birth Cohort Study • Next Steps <p>Pay to access sources include data analytics from Emsi and Burning Glass which present web-scraped job vacancies and job profiles alongside other sources of data</p>
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Notes:

1. Official statistics (including National Statistics) includes data published as management information by official statistics producers.
2. Government funded surveys refers to those surveys which are not official statistics, but which are commissioned and published by Government, for example through the Government Social Research Service. Government funded surveys published as official or National Statistics are listed under official statistics.

Annex 2: Transition to the Secure Research Service

- A2.1 The [Secure Research Service](#) is the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) facility for providing secure access to sensitive de-identified data, for research that serves the public good. From the end of September 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) began making use of the ONS Secure Research Service, to enable third party access to individual-level data based upon the [five safes model](#) (safe people, safe settings, safe projects, safe data, safe outputs). The approach has the benefit that rather than transferring physical data files to the user, the user accesses the data, held within ONS secure data lab, remotely.
- A2.2 It was initially planned that education researchers would use a new iteration of the ONS Secure Research Service, from September 2018, which would offer benefits in terms of how easy it is to establish remote connectivity. Unfortunately, during early life a persistent bug was identified that causes screen freeze for users.
- A2.3 DfE and ONS have deployed a range of contingencies. Where projects are impacted by the bug, they have:
- a) Provided ONS laptops which connect the user to the current Secure Research Service.
 - b) Agreed with the user that they will work out of one of the ONS Safe Settings located at offices in London (One Drummond Gate), Newport (Gwent), Titchfield, Belfast and Glasgow.
 - c) In limited instances, where provision of ONS laptops has not met need or not worked due to complications with local wifi settings, subject to the satisfaction of the Data Sharing Approval Panel controls, and sign off by the Chief Data Officer, a short-term physical share of the data has been undertaken.
- A2.4 To establish the easy remote connectivity originally planned, ONS has now amended the existing Secure Research Service technology and increased its capacity to enable significantly greater use. ONS is currently in the latter stages of testing this remote connectivity with users, which should enable remote access to research data in April 2019.