



HM Courts &  
Tribunals Service

# HMCTS Data Strategy

Our vision and plan for a data-driven  
courts and tribunals service

December 2021





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# Letter from the CEO

**“When we say the word ‘data’ it may sound like something far removed from what we do and the people we serve on a day to day basis. In reality, what we do every day produces – and uses - thousands of pieces of data which, when we combine them, tell us a story about the people who use our services and how well we are serving them and society.”**

We rely on data to understand the trends in our performance and drive improvement, and it is key to evaluating the Reform Programme and driving our response to the pandemic. Data tells us if the services we are providing meet the expectations of our users and the adjustments we need to make for those who are vulnerable. It also increases transparency and provides the information that is crucial in understanding the wider justice system. Ultimately, better data means a better understanding of HMCTS and those who use our services, and therefore informs better decision making about how HMCTS is run.

As HMCTS recovers from the pandemic and continues delivery of Reform, we know that our data has yet to reach the level of consistency and simplicity necessary to allow us to exploit it to the extent we would like. Data is a key part of both our HMCTS objectives, and the wider priorities of Ministry of Justice.

This document setting out the data strategy for HMCTS is a key part of the broader Ministry of Justice data strategy to be published in early 2022.

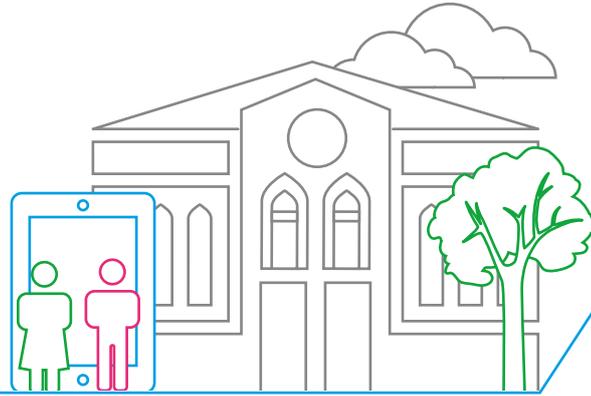
I am introducing this Data Strategy to support the improvement of data across HMCTS, and to subsequently support all that we would like to achieve with data - ultimately helping to deliver swift access to justice for all who need it.



**“In HMCTS, we too are committed to treating data as one of our most valuable assets; not just because of what it can do for HMCTS but because of the impact it has on the people who use our services and on the wider justice system.”**

**Kevin Sadler,**  
Acting Chief Executive and Accounting Officer  
December 2021

# Introduction



**The justice system is an essential public service, relied upon by millions of victims, families and businesses across our country to deliver justice outcomes that matter to them.**

HMCTS has a key purpose – to run an efficient and effective courts and tribunals system, which supports an independent judiciary in the administration of justice, enabling the rule of law to be upheld and providing access to justice for all.

Our Reform Programme and our response to the pandemic have enabled HMCTS to gradually become a more data-driven organisation and highlighted the opportunity and need for further change. Data has, more than ever before, become an important asset in the delivery of justice. It aids our efforts to support an independent judiciary in upholding the rule of law, provide access to justice for all, improve performance and efficiency, drive fairness, promote openness and transparency, and maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Data is key to our efforts to recover from the pandemic and, in the longer term will enable the evaluation of our multi-year Reform Programme.

Our data strategy will deliver significant benefits, from improving our decisions because we better understand our users and have a stronger evidence base, to improving our operational effectiveness because we can optimise processes through performance analytics, identify and resolve blockers and automate low value processes. We will also be enabling wider societal benefits through making data open where possible and sharing data ethically and responsibly, in accordance with all applicable Codes of Practice and personal data laws, to drive collaborative insight and innovative thinking.



As set out in the 2019 “Digital Justice Report” and our response, to achieve our key strategic ambitions and deliver on our purpose it is paramount that we not only collect the right data, but also further develop the right data infrastructure and data capabilities. By sustaining and expanding our efforts to share more and better data we will improve our transparency and democratic accountability.

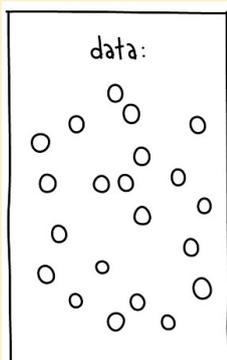
We also need to enable others to help us understand ‘what works’ and develop innovative solutions that can help improve access to justice, the rule of law and the attractiveness of the UK legal services sector.

In the following sections of this strategy we set out how we are going to do just that.

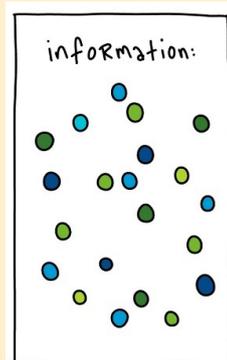
# Why we have a data strategy

Thousands of pieces of data flow through HMCTS every day. We run on data and it is integral to every part of our business. Data is what allows us to forecast our business needs, understand our performance, identify issues and set our priorities, so by improving our data we will improve the services we provide.

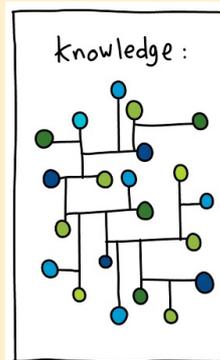
This data can be about the people we serve whether, for example, they are applying for a divorce online or appearing as a witness in court. It can be about how many people we have working within HMCTS and the locations in which they are based. Or, it can be about the number of courtrooms we have, which are in use on any given day and the cost of running our services.



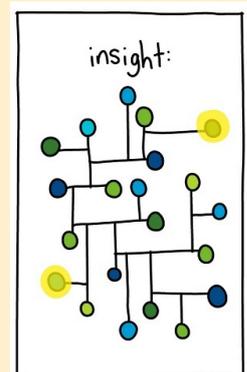
Data are basic facts. This would be a piece of data:  
20011014



When we add context to that data, we get information:  
Jon Smith, DOB:  
2001.10.14



When we aggregate information and draw connections, we start to generate knowledge:  
Jon Smith is one of 437 people in the dataset who are 19. 23% of the dataset is 19 years old.



When we recognize patterns, we can generate insight. Examining patterns allows us to identify risk factors and inform improved policies. A higher proportion of 19-year-olds are convicted of crimes than any other age.

Graphic credit of © Gapingvoid Culture Design Group - [www.gapingvoid.com](http://www.gapingvoid.com) & David Somerville

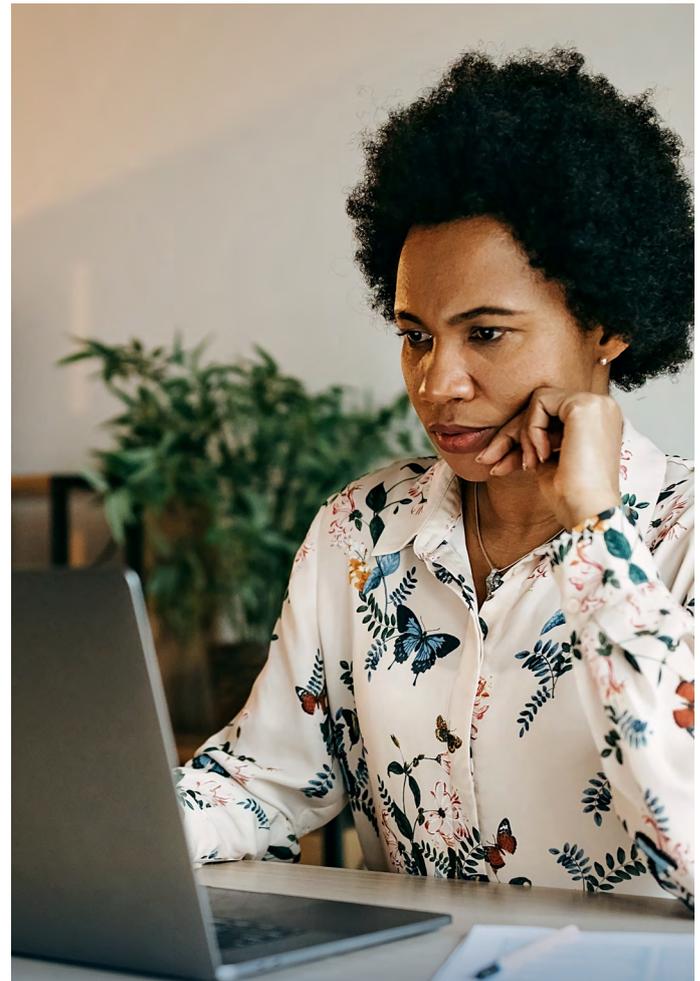


Many organisations already view data as their most valuable resource. Advances in digitisation and automation allow more data to be captured and processed, and modern data architecture and reporting tools make close to real-time data accessible and exploitable for insight and improvement. Cutting edge data science techniques allow modelling, forecasting and predictions with higher accuracy and machine learning and artificial intelligence provide huge potential for innovation.

In HMCTS, we too are committed to treating data as one of our most valuable assets; not just because of what it can do for HMCTS but because of the impact it has on the people who use our services and on the wider justice system. We steward and support people through some of their most difficult times and data is an important lever by which we can continuously improve the service and support that we provide, recognising that lost time and inefficiency have real-life implications. If that impact is to be a positive one, we must protect information which is personal and sensitive, ensuring such information is used only with proper authority and control, and only where service improvement requires it.

The HMCTS Reform Programme is modernising how we are working. Historically, there have been over 200 systems in HMCTS that range from over 30 to 5 years old. The complexity of the number of older systems and the introduction of new systems brought in by our Reform Programme means that gaining insight and value from the data they produce requires significant manual intervention. HMCTS is data rich, but we don't currently harness the potential of our raw data to its fullest extent, and there is a lot that still needs to be improved upon before we can do so.

We have been working to improve our data in a number of ways over the past two years. This HMCTS Data Strategy brings this work together under one coherent framework that sets out the vision for data for the period ahead.



*“The main problem with overlaying new technology on old ways of doing things was data mismatch. For example, when identifying individuals, names often didn't tally: Jon Smith might be Jon Smith in the Court Service, Jonathan Smith in the tax system... JR Smith in the police systems.”*

**National Audit Office January 2021**

# The strategy within government and the wider justice system

**Our data strategy is in line with national, cross-government and Ministry of Justice ambitions to improve the use and quality of our data to ensure fairness and effectiveness across our services.**

The Government-wide National Data Strategy seeks to build on the use of data during the pandemic and sets out the ambitious mission to unlock the value of data across the UK economy. The Government is encouraging a pro-growth and trusted data regime, to transform our use of data to drive efficiency and improve public services, ensure the security and resilience of the infrastructure that data relies on and champion the international flow of data.

Within the Ministry of Justice, we are emphasising how data is key across the justice system by:

- ensuring that the HMCTS systems we reform have data to assess service effectiveness and continuous improvement
- demonstrating the power of departmental data to support strategy, policy and operational decision-making

In support of our goals across the Ministry of Justice and in government, we in HMCTS have embarked upon significant modernisation and improvement to our services through our Reform Programme. In recovering from the pandemic, we will build back a stronger courts and tribunals service. It is therefore vital we focus on accessing the power inherent in our new systems and services. It may seem inevitable that there are tensions between open justice, individual privacy, and transparency and there are indeed a number of challenges ahead. One of the aims of this strategy and ongoing work is to resolve those tensions through establishing principled and effective governance for the use of data. Those solutions will be embedded into future practice.



**In support of our goals across the Ministry of Justice and in government, we in HMCTS have embarked upon significant modernisation and improvement to our services through our Reform Programme. In recovering from the pandemic, we will build back a stronger courts and tribunals service.**



Alongside HMCTS's focus on recovery and the end of reform up to 2023, our data strategy will continue to underpin work across the department into the future. The strategy will support the work of the judiciary, as well as wider parts of the Ministry of Justice family, in upholding the principle of open justice and strengthening public confidence in the justice system.

Through development and delivery of this strategy, we will have the data we need to understand our users, evaluate our interventions, and to actively manage the day-to-day running of our business. Our data strategy will ensure:

- we improve our data collection processes and develop a more proactive culture of engaging with data across the whole business
- we use our data to understand the pathways people take through the courts and tribunals service and provide insight on how we can continue to improve and drive performance

Our strategy is built on five foundational pillars. Implementation will translate our vision into reality:

1. to gather, hold, curate, and protect the data we need now, and in the future
2. to manage our analysis and modelling effectively
3. to have the right analytical skills and culture
4. to use data and insight to deliver efficient and high-quality services
5. to open and share data safely to support transparency and allow others to innovate and deliver better services

# The pillars of our strategy will drive our outputs and improve outcomes

Our data strategy is based around five pillars. We are taking a programmatic approach to the data strategy in HMCTS and have planned the outputs and outcomes we want to achieve. Each of our core data strategy pillars is made up of a set of objectives and activities, setting out the steps to take to achieve our vision of being truly data-driven.

1. **We gather, hold, curate and protect the data we need now, and in the future, so our data can be accessible and comprehensible across the business**
  - 1a. Define the data we have and need
  - 1b. Create a rigorous library and efficient architecture
  - 1c. Ensure information is secure and handled properly
  - 1d. Ensure data is fit for purpose and of appropriate quality
  - 1e. Develop infrastructure to access, manipulate and analyse HMCTS data
2. **We manage our analysis and modelling effectively, so we can free up analytical resource for more higher value, proactive, exploratory work**
  - 2a. Establish coherence and consistency across our analytical models
  - 2b. Establish a good process for requesting and prioritising analysis
  - 2c. Agree standards for performance reporting and analysis
  - 2d. Establish standards for analytical modelling and forecasting
3. **We have the right analytical skills and culture, so we can enjoy a culture where everyone is able to find, use, and protect the data they need**
  - 3a. We have a clear vision and plan for analytical capability and capacity
  - 3b. We have a credible vision and plan for analytical skills expected in different roles
  - 3c. We have clarity over roles, responsibilities and accountability for data in HMCTS
4. **We use data and insight to deliver efficient and high-quality services, so we can have better evidence of where our approaches increase value, or where changes might improve outcomes**
  - 4a. Well-designed data and consistent reports drive performance for frontline and HQ teams
  - 4b. We use data and insights to plan the next evolution of HMCTS services and strategy
  - 4c. Data provides Ministry of Justice and Judicial Office with evidence for service and policy development
  - 4d. Data enables evaluation that provides insights and external assurance of our impact

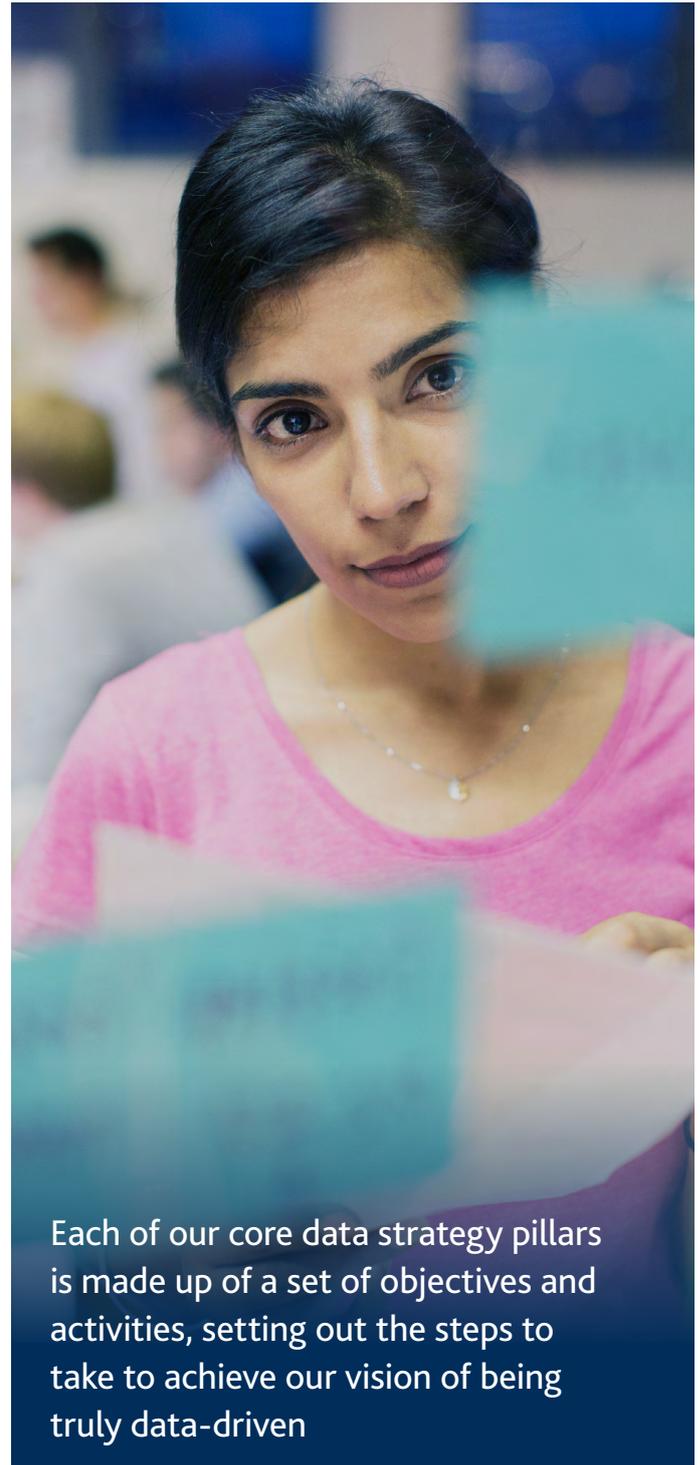


**5. We share data to support transparency and allow others to innovate and deliver better services, so we can build confidence in HMCTS systems and facilitate improvement to access to justice**

- 5a. We regularly provide data for access via a data catalogue, and issue government social research and/or other publications of statistical information
- 5b. We provide good quality data to support communications and build trust; and communications amplify the impact of our data
- 5c. Our data is shared (with appropriate controls) to support an 'ecosystem' of others.

Each of these pillars are interlocking foundations – it is through progress and investment in each element that we unlock the full opportunities described above, such that:

- data definitions and improved data quality enables automation, effective migration from legacy systems, and cross-agency information sharing
- common data standards and modelling assumptions enable self-service and better forecasting
- better data skills empower curiosity about and commitment to good data from point of collection
- good reports help us evaluate progress and identify what areas to prioritise and how to argue for the most effective change
- sharing data within agreed governance principles and active management controls leads to collaborative innovation



Each of our core data strategy pillars is made up of a set of objectives and activities, setting out the steps to take to achieve our vision of being truly data-driven

# Case Studies

## Case Study 1:

### Publishing more accurate Management Information on the Crime jurisdiction

The COVID-19 pandemic saw growing public need for timely access to justice statistics. Across the Crime jurisdiction we improved the timeliness and accuracy of Crime data by:

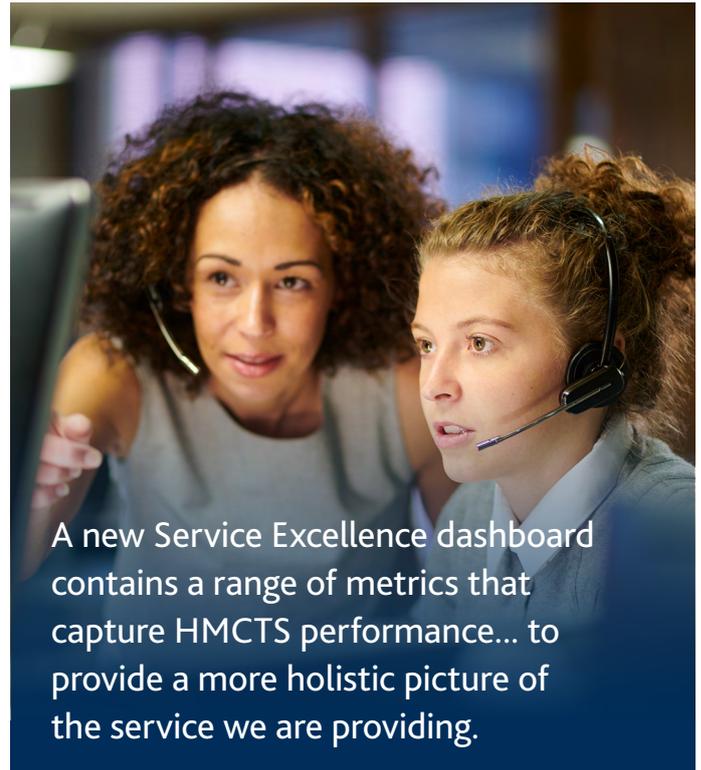
- aligning methodologies with the Ministry of Justice, leading to improved transparency and accuracy of National Statistics that will be published in the public domain
- producing weekly reporting to operational staff to identify missing data entries on the case management system, which has resulted in more accurate data produced for both Management Information and National Statistics
- producing self-serve and investigatory dashboards, allowing us to investigate any anomalies in the data by having instant access to case numbers to cross reference in case management systems. This has helped us to identify, solve and be transparent on potential data issues

## Case Study 2:

### A Service Excellence dashboard illustrating our performance

A new Service Excellence dashboard contains a range of metrics that capture HMCTS performance outside the “normal” metrics of waiting times or outstanding caseload to provide a more holistic picture of the service we are providing.

These metrics include reasonable adjustments, positive feedback users have provided, complaints, data incidents, health and safety or fire incidents and detention-related failures. The dashboard then breaks these metrics down by category and also by region to give them more operational relevance. It is also interactive, allowing users to self-serve and carry out the breakdowns and analysis most relevant



A new Service Excellence dashboard contains a range of metrics that capture HMCTS performance... to provide a more holistic picture of the service we are providing.

to their work – enabling deeper understanding and saving time and resources.

With this dashboard, we can properly investigate our users’ experiences as they pass through the courts system and see the points where things work well or where they go off track so that we can then plan adjustments and interventions that will have the most positive impact.

## Case Study 3:

### The Data Access Services Team facilitating access to courts data

The new HMCTS Data Access Services Team (DAST) was set up to improve access to HMCTS data and support the Shadow Data Governance Panel (SDGP), an independent advisory panel and the first initiative to bring the judiciary, civil servants and academia together in one forum focused on court data.



The team has developed a system for assessing the feasibility, lawfulness and public interest of access requests and has reconstituted the HMCTS Data Access Panel under new terms of reference and with new membership.

As a result of streamlined processes and improved data governance, DAST has been able to administer more data access requests – 74 between Jan and Oct 2021 – making it easier for external stakeholders to request our data and use it safely, and providing the foundation for HMCTS to produce an open and accessible data catalogue.

#### Case Study 4: Using Protected Characteristics data to improve access to justice

The collection of users' Protected Characteristics data has been added to reformed services as a common component and the analysis of the data is being used in the Access to Justice assessments that all reformed services are required to undertake.

We piloted the Access to Justice assessment approach in Probate, where linking case level data to the Protected Characteristic data allowed us to identify potential variance in access by user group. This approach allowed us to identify a difference in how long it takes different user groups to complete certain Probate cases.

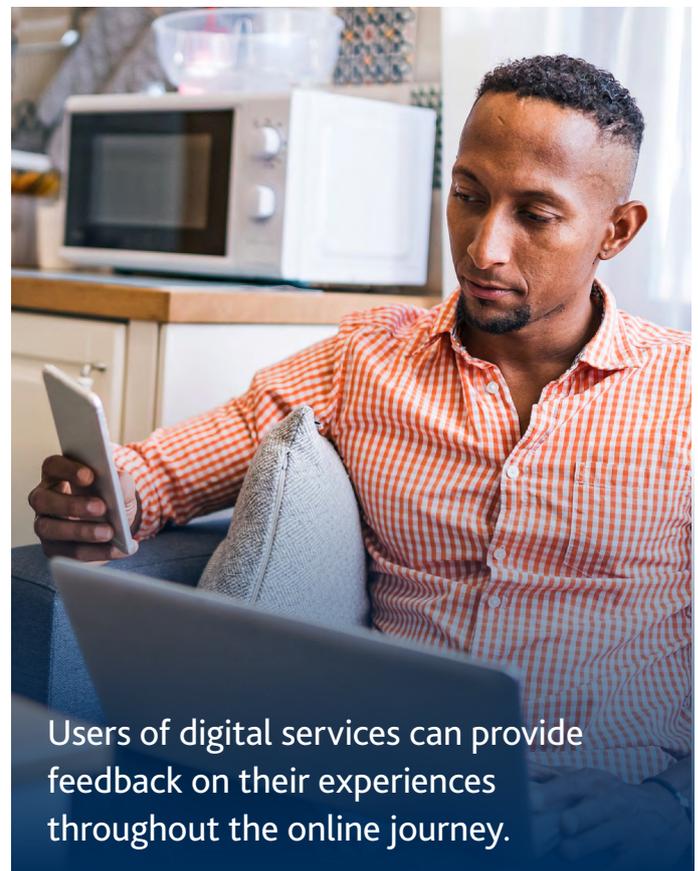
We used this finding to then carry out further analysis that identified the underlying operational cause of the variance. Now we are implementing operational fixes and will continue to monitor the data to ensure that the issue is fully resolved.

#### Case Study 5: User feedback surveys identify improvements for digital services

Users of digital services can provide feedback on their experiences throughout the online journey. We can then use this feedback to identify potential improvements to, or issues with, the digital service. There are two main ways to give feedback:

- upon completing an online application, users are asked to complete an exit survey – this contains questions on user satisfaction, user effort, help required and ideas for improvement
- users progressing through an online application can click the page banner to leave in-page feedback – this allows users to report issues or problems with specific pages of the application

Most of the feedback we receive, namely the in-page feedback and ideas for improvements, is unstructured data. We have developed a text analysis tool that allows us to analyse and process this feedback in almost-real-time so we can quickly identify and respond to issues in digital services. In the Probate service, the text analysis tool has been used to identify and help investigate technical issues.



Users of digital services can provide feedback on their experiences throughout the online journey.

# Turning our vision into change through projects and priorities

Our data strategy programme of work will deliver change across HMCTS. We are strengthening our data basics and our analytical capability step-by-step, making sure that we have the right foundations in place to forecast accurately, use good evidence to improve our services effectively, and be accessible and transparent.

By the end of 2023 we will have delivered a series of projects that will enhance our ability to run an efficient and effective courts and tribunals system, provide access to justice and strengthen the impact of our Reform programmes.

- **A data catalogue for open and shared data resources** will be published by the end of 2021/2022 so that academics, researchers and other external stakeholders can more easily navigate and understand the data and information available to them. HMCTS uses objective criteria to determine when a data source can be accessed safely and publishes its decisions. HMCTS decisions will be made with reference to the advice of a senior Data Governance Panel which has civil service, judicial and independent academic representation.
- **Our Master and Reference Data project will identify enterprise level master and reference data** by the end of 2021/2022, including for our locations. This will address the issue of court buildings with different names across our systems or the same name being used differently. Establishing this commonality across HMCTS will mean that we have more effective data about our hearings.
- **The HMCTS Strategic Data Platform**, to be completed by spring 2023, will reduce our reliance on manual processes to extract and transform data from old technology and allow teams to modernise their skill sets and to exploit our data more effectively. The implementation on the new platform will move the production of Management Information (MI) to a new cloud-based data warehouse. With our Reform MI Build project, dashboards for reformed systems will be produced automatically through the Strategic Data Platform.
- **A Data Quality Strategy** will move us from identifying and fixing individual data quality issues to a system-wide improvement of data quality.

## The kind of priority opportunities this will unlock

The foundational improvement made to our data and the implementation of our data strategy in HMCTS will unlock opportunities. For example, they can transform the service we provide by:

### Using user insight to improve operational efficiency

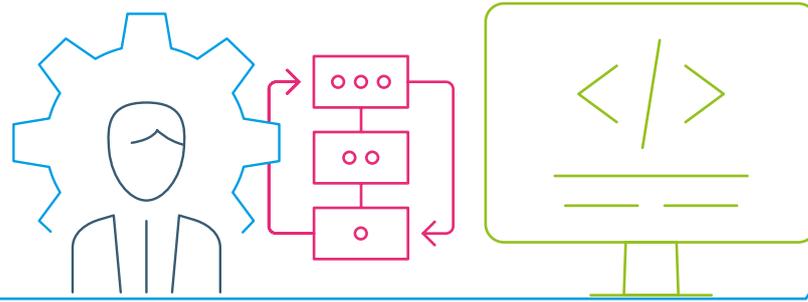
- Customer insights identify that users with multiple recent interactions with the courts system often forget to provide information on time. User data can be linked across services to build a predictive model that can target additional reminders to those who need it most.

### Using data and evaluation to drive better user contact

- HMCTS constantly tests and evolves communications through analytically robust evaluations of randomised trials. These trials can be seamlessly integrated into live operational services and outcomes monitored through core systems.

### Using data to ensure reasonable adjustments

- HMCTS can ensure that reasonable adjustments for individual users are recorded and shared across services. This information is available to staff in court rooms to ensure that cost-effective adjustments are ready for the day of face-to-face user interactions.



### Transform operational processes using advanced analytics

- HMCTS is able to use analytical tools to ensure that individuals with multiple cases can have them scheduled on a single day. This requires an end-to-end process of exploring the feasibility, building a robust business case for change and implementation.

### Support our estates strategy with data and insight

- A consistent approach is taken to identifying the premises, staff and users for given court services. This can be analysed to understand the impact of changes on travel times and ease of access.

### Provide timely evaluations of individual reform projects

- Analysts can access consistent and comparable data for a service pre- and post-reform from the moment a service goes live. They can provide clearly presented monitoring data that supports immediate evaluation and improvement of the service.

### Adapt data capture to reflect new priorities

- If an error in the systems of another government department means there is an influx of new appeals, HMCTS is able to add a field to core operational systems quickly in order to help track the scale of the issue, share how the issue is being handled, and adapt support.

### Support the Ministry of Justice to make informed policy changes

- The Ministry of Justice can easily access information relating to HMCTS users in a timely manner to take a system-wide view of the impact of sentencing decisions, and to support Equality Impact Assessments for new policy proposals.

### Link data across government departments

- HMCTS will be able to link good quality justice data with Ministry of Justice, agency and other government datasets so academics, external partners, and policymakers have the insights to improve outcomes for citizens. All such data linking will be protected by clear governance principles and mechanisms.

We cannot know exactly what HMCTS will look like in the future. What we do know is that the future HMCTS will need good data and solid data foundations. Historically, we have not had good data or the frameworks to use it effectively, but this work is a big step towards addressing that.

This strategy marks the beginning of our work and sets out our approach to becoming truly data-driven. Over the next 18 months, our focus will be on delivering our priorities through the implementation and monitoring of our projects, working to collect the right data, developing the right infrastructure and capabilities to improve the services we provide, and sharing more and better data to help improve access to justice.



# HM Courts & Tribunals Service

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