



Department
for Education

Statistical policy statement on confidentiality

Statistical notice

January 2019

Confidentiality

The Department for Education is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of the data it receives, stores, processes and disseminates. The Department for Education complies with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) which outlines the responsibilities of statistical producers in relation to confidentiality.

T6 Data governance

Organisations should look after people's information securely and manage data in ways that are consistent with relevant legislation and serve the public good.

T6.1 All statutory obligations governing the collection of data, confidentiality, data sharing, data linking and release should be followed. Relevant nationally- and internationally-endorsed guidelines should be considered as appropriate. Transparent data management arrangements should be established and relevant ethics standards met.

T6.2 The rights of data subjects should be considered and managed at all times, in ways that are consistent with data protection legislation. When collecting data for statistical purposes, those providing their information should be informed in a clear and open way about how that information will be used and protected.

T6.3 Organisations, and those acting on their behalf, should apply best practice in the management of data and data services, including collection, storage, transmission, access, and analysis. Personal information should be kept safe and secure, applying relevant security standards and keeping pace with changing circumstances such as advances in technology.

T6.4 Organisations should be transparent and accountable about the procedures used to protect personal data when preparing the statistics and data including the choices made in balancing competing interests. Appropriate disclosure control methods should be applied before releasing statistics and data. Appropriate protocols should be applied to approved researchers accessing statistical microdata.

T6.5 Regular reviews should be conducted across the organisation, to ensure that data management and sharing arrangements are appropriately robust.

In addition to compliance with the principles and practices outlined in the Code of Practice, we are committed to protecting confidentiality to:

- Maintain the trust and co-operation of those who own and manage administrative data sources used by us and respondents to our surveys.
- Comply with the relevant legislation, including the General Data Protection Regulation.

Our arrangements for protecting confidentiality fall into three areas, as follows:

Personnel

All staff who work with data about individual persons, e.g. pupils in schools, receive appropriate security checks and training in protecting information. Secure working areas are provided for staff who work with confidential data about individual persons.

Data

Our arrangements for protecting private information about individual persons include:

- We provide detailed data security operational guidance for our staff.
- We use secure data transfer methods to transfer data to and from external bodies such as local authorities.
- Contracts with external organisations include data security clauses where appropriate.
- External bodies who wish to access our data are required to complete a confidentiality agreement. Where the agreement is approved by the Head of Profession for Statistics, only the minimum data needed for the specified purpose are released.
- We operate Service Level Agreements when sharing data with internal users and other governmental groups.
- Respondents to our data collection exercises receive privacy notices detailing what the data will be used for and our undertakings with respect to confidentiality.

Statistical disclosure control

Our approach to statistical disclosure control is based on UK Statistics Authority guidance on confidentiality in official statistics and Information Commissioner's Office guidance on anonymization.

We apply statistical disclosure control where there is a reasonable risk of sensitive personal information being identified by a motivated intruder who could use the information to cause damage, harm or distress to that individual.

For each of our statistical and data releases, we will assess the risk of disclosure of sensitive personal information based on the following:

- Level of aggregation of the data;
- Number of tables produced from each dataset;
- Size and characteristics of the population;
- Likelihood of an identification attempt;
- Consequences of disclosure.

Where disclosure control is decided to be necessary to protect confidentiality, the most appropriate method of disclosure control will be applied which minimises the risk of disclosure while maximising the utility of the statistics. To further reduce the risk of identification details of the disclosure control methodology are not published.

Where data has the potential to disclose sensitive personal information about protected or vulnerable children we apply more rigorous disclosure control methods and seek to eliminate the risk of identification.

Much of the department's published data is based on census collections and administrative data which gives us confidence in the accuracy of small numbers. Where figures are produced based on survey data, with estimates based on a sample of the population, rounding or suppression may be applied based on the quality of the data to avoid misinterpretation of small numbers.

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Department for Education



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