



Department  
for Education



Education & Skills  
Funding Agency

# **FE Workforce Data Collection**

**Government consultation**

**Launch date 20 March 2019**

**Respond by 11 June 2019**

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## Ministerial foreword

I am delighted to launch this consultation on proposals to improve data on the further education (FE) workforce.

We need a high-quality technical education and training system that complements the other investments we are making to increase productivity and compete globally. A thriving FE workforce is fundamental to delivering this agenda. There are currently several voluntary sector-led collections, but compared to other parts of the education system DfE collects relatively little workforce data.

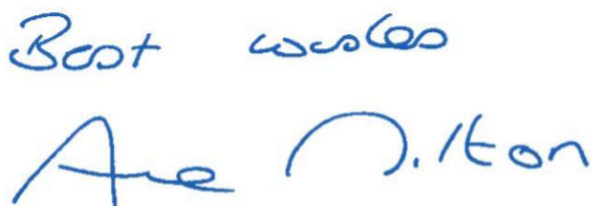
Last summer we undertook a Call for Evidence to understand your view on the data that is currently collected, what additional information might be needed, and how this could be collected. The feedback we received indicated that the sector places a high value on workforce data, and highlighted the collective effort that the sector has made in improving existing collections.

Based on the Call for Evidence, we have developed a set of policy proposals to improve the coverage and quality of FE workforce data. We are now launching a consultation on these plans. We need you to share your expertise, to make sure these proposals are fit for purpose for the whole sector.

I would encourage all those with an interest in the FE sector to take part in this consultation. Whether you are a teacher or a head of organisation, a researcher or a representative from a sector body, we really want to hear your views. I would also of course be happy to receive the views of anyone from the communities that are served by FE providers. This way, we can develop future data collections in a way that works for everyone.

While we work towards implementing these changes, DfE and sector bodies will continue to make requests for you to participate in research on the workforce. It is important that we achieve strong responses so that policy-making can be based on accurate and high-quality data. I would urge you to respond to as many of those returns as you feel able.

FE providers have a vital role to play in making sure that all people, of all ages, whatever their background, have the skills they need for jobs that give them a start in life. Long may this continue.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Best wishes" on the top line and "Anne Milton" on the bottom line.

**Rt Hon Anne Milton MP**  
Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

## Introduction

England needs a world-class further education (FE) system that develops the talents of young people and adults, and ensures they have access to the training they need. The quality of teachers and leaders is the biggest determinant of outcomes for learners. It is, therefore, critical that in England we have an FE system led by strong leaders, and excellent teachers with the right skills and qualifications, in order to deliver high-quality educational outcomes and financial sustainability.

In summer 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) undertook a Call for Evidence to understand FE sector opinions on the data that is currently collected in relation to FE workforce, what additional requirements there might be, and how the sector thought this could be achieved. The feedback we received indicated that the sector places a high value on workforce data. FE providers use data for workforce planning, sector analysis, benchmarking and identifying skills gaps. The Call highlighted the collective effort the sector has made in improving existing collections, and the lessons we can learn from this, which informs this consultation document.

However, the Call also identified areas for improvement. Compared to other phases of education, where responses to workforce data collections are compulsory, response rates and data coverage in FE have historically been lower. Consequently, the data has fewer uses and cannot be fully analysed to provide the insights the sector and government need. Considerable work has been carried out to increase participation in these FE data collections to date, and this will inform the development of any future data collection. In addition, a number of respondents identified data fields that are not currently collected, that they would find useful.

A summary of findings from the Call for Evidence is at annex A.

We continue to work closely with the sector through the DfE FE Research Advisory Board, as we progress reviewing and considering this feedback. This consultation now seeks your views on our proposed strategy to improve FE workforce data in England, that we have developed in response to the Call.

## Who this is for

This consultation is for anyone who has an interest in FE workforce data, including, but not limited to:

- FE providers in receipt of government funding from the ESFA (including, but not limited to, general and specialist FE colleges, sixth form colleges, independent learning providers, and adult and community learning providers);
- Principals / Chief Executives, governors, teachers, parents, learners, and HR Directors of these institutions; and
- Sector bodies representing these groups, research networks, and academics with an interest in FE.

## Issue date

The consultation was issued on 20 March 2019.

## Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on:

[feworkforcedata.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:feworkforcedata.consultation@education.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk](mailto:Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

## Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

## The response

The results of the consultation and DfE's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in autumn 2019.

## About this consultation

This consultation document makes 9 proposals, on:

- Quantity and quality of data available on the FE workforce;
- Scope of the data items for inclusion in the collection;
- Mandating data collection returns from FE providers;
- Identifying those providers within the scope of the data collection;
- Identifying staff types within the scope of the data collection;
- Methodology for data collection;
- Support and benefits for providers;
- Timing and frequency of the data collection; and
- Timeframe for implementing the data collection.

We would like to hear your views on these proposals.

## Respond online

To help us analyse the responses, please use the online system wherever possible.

Visit [www.education.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations) to submit your response.

## Other ways to respond

If, for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example, because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a Word document version of the form and email it or post it.

### By email

- [feworkforcedata.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:feworkforcedata.consultation@education.gov.uk)

### By post

FE Teachers and Leaders  
Department for Education  
Ground Floor  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

## Deadline

The consultation closes on 11 June 2019.

## Rationale for change

1. The principal source of data on the FE workforce is currently the Staff Individualised Record<sup>1</sup> (SIR) and the Education and Training Foundation's (ETF) associated Data Insights<sup>2</sup> publication series. They contain a valuable range of information on staff from the providers that have completed a return, including age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, occupation, and annual pay. In addition, for teaching staff, the data specifies subject(s) taught and qualification(s) held.

2. The SIR is the best available sector-led annual workforce data at present, but it has its limitations. Given it is a voluntary return, engagement rates are good, but coverage is not universal, reducing the quality of the data. In the 2016/17 SIR 17% of all providers responded, up from 15% in the previous year. This is an improvement, and was in part due to the work of ETF, AoC, UCU, HOLEX and AELP, who helped to engage the sector. We welcome this improvement in coverage, but response rates need to be higher to improve reliability and to provide the valuable insights across the sector that are needed. In addition, the proportion of independent learning providers responding to the SIR, at approximately 7%, is substantially lower than FE colleges. By comparison, the School Workforce Census (SWC) achieves nearly 100% coverage, although this exercise is a legal requirement and has therefore been mandated for a number of years, making participation ubiquitous in school culture. In addition to this, staff data must be provided by higher education institutions in returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), resulting in universal coverage.

3. There are other workforce data collections carried out by the sector and representative bodies that provide a valuable supplement to this evidence base, for example the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Annual Workforce Survey<sup>3</sup> and the Sixth Form Colleges Association's (SFCA) Funding Impact Survey (FIS)<sup>4</sup>. In 2018, DfE also carried out a College Staff Survey<sup>5</sup>, and we are expanding the scope of our survey programme to cover other FE providers (ie Sixth Form Colleges, Independent Learning Providers, Local Authorities and Adult Community Learning) who we currently know less about in terms of workforce. By improving the quality of FE workforce data, we hope to remove the need for multiple collections, which in turn should reduce the administrative burden on FE providers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Staff-Individualised-Records-Data-Report-SIR-25-2016-17.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sirdatainsights.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aoc.co.uk/about-colleges/research-and-stats/surveys-and-research/aoc-surveys>

<sup>4</sup> <https://sfcawebsite.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/Funding-Impact-Survey-2017-FINAL-0.pdf?t=1545405361>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/college-staff-survey-2018> Please note, the CSS report contains findings from principals, teachers and leaders within general and specialist FE colleges.



4. It is important to note that, subject to the findings of this consultation, we intend to implement these proposals from the 2020/21 academic year. In the meantime, we expect to continue to collect data on the FE workforce through ETF's delivery of SIR27. Further to this, although DfE intends taking more direct control over data collection, we would continue to work closely with ETF, as the body we grant fund to support FE workforce development.

# Our policy objective – to improve the quantity and quality of data available on the FE workforce

## Proposal and rationale

5. Our intention is to carry out a single annual DfE-led, mandatory data collection, which would consolidate other data collections, reduce the burden on FE providers and maximise value for money. However, we will continue to consider other delivery options throughout the consultation process.

6. The Call showed that nearly all respondents said collecting workforce data is important – 88% considered it to be at least ‘fairly important’. We aim to improve the quantity and quality of data available on the FE workforce to:

- enable the sector to benchmark and evaluate its own performance effectively;
- make the data available on FE consistent across the sector and with other phases of education; and
- provide a solid evidence base for policy development, investment in FE workforce development, and assessing recruitment pressures on FE providers.

7. There are always resource implications concerning data collection, and this too was reflected in the Call. We want to ensure that our proposals are fair and reasonable to implement for all provider types, recognising the diversity of organisations operating as FE providers, and as reflected in the Call, one approach may not be suitable for all sector providers.

*‘Any major changes should ideally be staged, to smooth implementation through piloting and testing activities. This would afford providers the time to adapt and introduce any necessary systemic changes.’ (Summary Report - Call for evidence – workforce data collection in further education)*

8. We therefore intend to work closely with the sector and representative bodies to ensure that our approach minimises administrative burdens and takes account of the diversity of the sector. Extensive user testing will allow us to identify the needs of the sector and exploit all opportunities to create additional benefits, such as quality-assured data outputs to assist in workforce planning, shared in a timely manner. We will consider user need and ensure we work through any issues with those involved in making returns, identifying barriers and addressing them collaboratively.

9. This data collection will be fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as outlined in the DfE privacy notice<sup>6</sup>. GDPR is a new, European-wide law that regulates the handling of personal data. It places greater obligations on how organisations handle and protect personal data. It came into effect on 25 May 2018. We will confirm the details for storing and processing the data items collected in advance of the collection.

**Q1. Given the recognised need for improved and comparable data across the FE workforce, is a single DfE-led data collection, tailored to the sector, the best way to achieve this? Please state the reasons for your response.**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/personal-information-charter>

## Scope of the data items for inclusion in the collection

10. The sector told us that existing workforce data is used for planning, which covers activities such as identifying skills gaps and shortages, monitoring workforce performance, reviewing recruitment and retention, and organising programmes of professional development. We have reviewed the data currently collected on the FE workforce, as well as collections that are undertaken in other sectors, to identify data items from management systems which could be collected to support this use.

11. Below are examples of the types of data items we will consider collecting on in-scope staff (as applicable). We realise the data items held by providers will vary, so our work with users will help to identify those items that are readily available and those items we may not be able to collect. Therefore, the final list of data items will be refined, considered alongside GDPR guidelines and agreed during the testing phase, when we will work with the sector to develop the necessary collection tools.

Data headings	Examples of relevant data
<b>Provider level information</b>	UKPRN, provider type, standard contracted hours for staff
<b>Demographic information</b>	Age, date of birth, gender, other personal characteristics
<b>Job role information</b>	Job role classified against a common set of definitions, time in post, time at organisation
<b>Working arrangements</b>	Contract type
<b>Pay</b>	Salary, full time equivalence
<b>Qualifications and experience</b>	Highest qualification, technical qualifications, teaching qualifications, professional status
<b>Curriculum</b>	Spread of subjects taught, main subject taught
<b>Vacancy data</b>	Number of vacancies, persistent vacancies

12. The Call demonstrated that the main way to minimise the burden of submitting data to a workforce collection was by prioritising the data collected, with several respondents proposing collecting limited core workforce metrics frequently, and less important data every two or three years. It is therefore our intention to test which specific core items we will collect that are essential to the sector and for government use and with a clear purpose, adding data from existing sources where possible. We will aim to keep the core data items stable over time, to reduce disruption, ensure longitudinal comparability, and minimise the burden on respondents.

**Q2. Do you foresee any issues providing this kind of data? Please state the reasons for your response.**

## Mandating data returns

13. Historically, FE workforce data returns have been provided on a voluntary basis, and we have seen lower response rates in comparison with similar collections in other phases of education, where returns are mandatory. This leaves FE workforce data vulnerable to gaps and inconsistencies over time.

14. FE providers, government and sector bodies all need the data to be as robust as it can be, to underpin effective policy development, benchmarking, planning and ongoing evaluation. Therefore, we are proposing to mandate FE workforce data returns using the contracts and grant agreements the ESFA has with FE providers for post-16 education and training, underpinned by powers under section 54 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (as amended by section 40 of the Technical and Further Education Act 2017<sup>7</sup>), which enables the Secretary of State to require information for purposes related to FE from providers in receipt of ESFA funding. We are considering how this approach could be applied to providers that are funded by Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) or the Greater London Authority (GLA), but do not also receive funding from the ESFA.

15. Just over half of respondents to the Call supported mandatory data collection, while less than one-quarter opposed it. We believe mandating returns is the best way to ensure representative, high-quality data. Improving coverage and quality of data will be valuable as it will allow for better benchmarking of providers' performance, and more effective monitoring of workforce changes over time. These changes will ensure closer alignment with the data collection arrangements we hold with schools and higher education providers.

16. We propose that all in-scope providers in England will be expected to make a return in accordance with the specified deadline, and those who fail to comply will be subject to escalating sanctions, including a letter from the DfE FE and Skills Minister, and being publically named on the DfE website.

**Q3. Full participation from all providers in scope is clearly important. Do you agree with the principle of an escalating sanctions policy for those in-scope providers who fail to comply with the requirement to make a data return? Please state the reasons for your response.**

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/19/section/40>

## Providers within the scope of the data collection

17. We propose, in the first instance, that the FE workforce data collection will cover those providers receiving funding directly from the ESFA, (colleges, independent learning providers, local authorities<sup>8</sup>, etc.) through one or more of the following funding models, 16-19 (excluding Apprenticeships), Adult skills, Apprenticeships, Community Learning, European Social Funding (ESF), Other Adult and/or Other 16-19). However, we may seek to increase the coverage in the future, for example, to include sub-contractors as well. We already have clear communication channels and agreements with this group of providers. Furthermore, these providers are in receipt of the majority of FE funding allocated and, therefore, play a significant role in delivery of public policy. We are considering how this approach could be applied to providers that are funded by MCAs or the GLA, but do not also receive funding from the ESFA.

**Q4. Do you agree with the proposed initial scope of providers and what, if any, issues do you foresee? Do you have any possible solutions?**

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<sup>8</sup> We will not be including school sixth forms funded under Part 2 of their 16-19 agreements.

## Staff types within the scope of the data collection

18. Respondents to the Call were overwhelmingly supportive of collecting data on both teaching and support staff, with ‘at least four-fifths stating it is at least “fairly important” to collect data on all staff categories’. Our policy focus is predominantly on those staff delivering and managing learning provision, such as teachers, leaders and learning support staff. However, we are also keen to support providers in their desire to plan, benchmark and model across all staff groups. The financial viability of the sector is hugely important. To ensure providers are able to robustly plan their staffing requirements across their entire workforce and respond to future policy implementation, they need to understand how their organisation should respond.

19. As such, we propose requiring all in-scope providers to supply individual-level data on all staff working in their organisation, if they are in regular service<sup>9</sup>, as is the case with the School Workforce Census. Each individual should be engaged to work within the provider under arrangements that must be recordable as either a contract or a service agreement. There will be some organisations where publicly-funded training is only a part their overall offer. In these cases we would only require a return on those staff who are directly or indirectly involved in providing or supporting this publicly-funded work.

20. We would also like to consider including elected members of FE providers' governing bodies in this data collection. The function of governors and other non-executive leaders, while different from staff providing their services under contract or through a service agreement, does form a key part of a college's leadership, about which data should be captured. Not all the information we are proposing to collect for paid staff would be relevant. However, having up-to-date information relevant to their role would have a number of benefits. It could highlight areas where additional support may be required such as in strengthening diversity on boards, or in ensuring the right mix of skills and experience. It would also highlight where boards are struggling to recruit governors or suitably-qualified governance professionals, and boards would be able to benchmark themselves against other similar providers.

21. We will work with the sector to understand the various role types within the FE sector, beyond teachers and leaders, to ensure the collection is appropriate and useful to all provider types.

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<sup>9</sup> We are considering mirroring the SWFC guidance for 2018, which states: “Staff are in regular service if they have completed service of 28 days or more with the school, or are expected to do so, before the end of their contract or service agreement.”

**Q5. Do you agree with the scope of staff types to be included within the data return? Please state the reasons for your response.**

**Q6. Do you agree that data collected on the FE workforce should include FE governors, governance professionals, and others in equivalent roles? What sort of data should be collected for this group? Please state the reasons for your response.**



## Methodology for data collection

22. We want to create systems and processes that make providing FE workforce data returns as simple as possible for in-scope providers. The Call indicated that, although the sector regards workforce data as important, data accuracy and the time and resource required to complete returns were key concerns.

23. The Call went on to suggest a 'flexible approach' for collecting the data would be preferred, to accommodate the different management information systems used by providers. For example, providers could submit their data either via:

- **Automated reporting systems** that draw existing data from payroll or management information to populate a data return. This would make use of existing databases. We will provide a specification to enable providers to code and pre-populate data into agreed formats; or,
- **Datsheets** that enable providers with systems that do not support automated transfers to extract, collate and record data in a consistent template for submission.

24. The user testing process referred to in para. 7 means the development of the methodology will be consultative. How we use existing data to prepopulate sections of the collection is an important aspect to explore as it will reduce the administrative burden. How we collate the data to ensure providers are able to comply and what data we can retain and reuse for subsequent collections, will all be considered as part of the testing process with the sector.

25. The current School Workforce Census collects data about a single day in the academic year, whereas the SIR collects retrospective data across the complete academic year. There are pros and cons to both approaches, and our user testing process will be key to identifying the type of collection that provides the most robust, representative and accurate data.

**Q7. What systems are you able to accommodate for the proposed data collection? What issues do you foresee and what might the solutions be?**

**Q8. What is your view regarding the timeframe for collection – should we focus on one day in the year, a week, or the data for a complete academic year? Please state the reasons for your response.**

## Support and benefits for providers

26. A range of support is currently available to providers to help them respond to DfE data requests. There is an existing support desk, taking calls from providers requiring technical support or policy advice. As part of the user testing process we will, therefore, look to establish which support model would be required to enable providers to complete a fully formed response, building upon responses to this consultation.

27. It is also important to exploit all the opportunities this new data collection could create for both government and the sector. The Call told us that existing workforce data is used by the sector for a range of planning activity, such as identifying skills gaps and shortages, monitoring workforce performance, reviewing recruitment and retention, and organising programmes of professional development. The user testing and development of the collection will clarify the needs of the sector, and hopefully create a number of additional benefits, such as to:

- Enable data to be collected in a timely manner and released to users more quickly;
- Deliver quality assured data to users in a format that is accessible and fit for purpose;
- Reduce the burden on those who submit the data returns, by reducing the number of collections and streamlining the collection process; and
- Investigate the outputs most useful to the sector and facilitate their creation and distribution, for example a benchmarking tool.

**Q9. What support would you need to complete a data collection? Please provide reasons for your response.**

**Q10. What outputs from the data returns would you find useful? Please provide reasons for your answer.**

## Timing and frequency of the data collection

28. Two-thirds of respondents to the Call expressed a preference for an annual data collection. However, there was no consensus on the best time of year for the collection to take place. Preferences reflected the wish to either align data collection with existing administration activities or to avoid particularly busy periods in administrative or workforce cycles. There was no clear indication from the findings of the Call that would identify a particularly suitable or unsuitable time of the year to carry out the data collection, regardless of the type of provider responding.

29. We therefore propose an annual collection of workforce data to take place early in the calendar year over a two-month window (eg February and March). However, the duration, timing and frequency of the collection will be reviewed, bearing in mind the responses to this consultation, in collaboration with the sector as part of the user testing process referred to in para. 7.

**Q11. Do you agree with the proposed frequency of the data collection? Please state the reasons for your response.**

**Q12. Do you agree with the proposed timing and duration of the data collection? Please state the reasons for your response.**

## Timeframe for implementation

30. We are keen to implement these changes as soon as possible, so we are able to use and share the evidence, and better understand the implications and impact of government policy reforms on the FE workforce.

31. However, we recognise that the sector needs time to assimilate and prepare for these changes. We therefore propose bringing in these changes from the academic year 2020/21 onwards. This will allow time to continue to work with the sector and carry out user testing in the 2019/20 academic year prior to full implementation. In addition, as outlined earlier, we expect the SIR27 will go ahead as planned.

**Q13. What, if any, issues do you foresee with the proposed timetable for implementation? Please state the reasons for your response.**

# **Annex A: Call for Evidence – workforce data in further education – summary report by CFE Research**

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors and the Department for Education (DfE) would like to thank all those who participated in this study. We thank the stakeholders in the Further Education (FE) sector who responded to the Call for Evidence as well as those who took part in follow up telephone interviews. We are particularly grateful to the FE Research Advisory Board who helped develop the Call for Evidence and its communication strategy in addition to providing their views on the subject. We also extend our thanks to the sector membership bodies who allowed the research team to attend their events and interview their delegates.

CFE Research would like to thank the project management team at the Department for Education for their support throughout the study.

# Introduction

## Background to the study

The Department for Education (DfE) wants to support a strong and resilient further education (FE) sector comprising a range of learning providers delivering high-quality learning opportunities for all learners and employers. High-quality, accurate and comprehensive workforce data is an important part of this vision for the success of the sector; the better the quality of workforce data, the better foundation of knowledge from which to develop FE policy.

In April 2018, the DfE commissioned CFE Research (CFE) to manage a Call for Evidence (the Call) on FE workforce data. The Call asks for views on what workforce data is currently collected, what other data might be needed, whether the sector thinks comprehensive coverage<sup>10</sup> could be achieved and the extent to which a mandatory data collection is desirable. The DfE plans to use the evidence to inform further exploration as to how workforce data will be collected in the future. It is anticipated that any changes to the collection and use of FE workforce data will build on and learn from the existing good practice found in the sector.

The DfE wished to canvass the initial views of people working in the FE sector who interact with workforce data in the following ways:

- Organisations who collect and provide data on their staff for internal purposes, ie FE institutions and businesses as part of their planning cycle;
- Organisations which collect data on their workforce on behalf of others. Examples of existing data collections include the Education and Training Foundation's (ETF's) Staff Individualised Record (SIR), the Association of Colleges' (AoC's) senior pay survey, and the University and College Union's (UCU's) freedom of information requests, among others;
- Organisations which use workforce data, for instance government departments, learning providers, representative bodies, research networks, and academics; and/or,
- Individuals who are the subjects of data collections, ie staff working in FE institutions and businesses.

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<sup>10</sup> Comprehensive coverage in this context refers to data collection which includes all types of FE learning providers as well as all teaching and support staff in regular employment within these organisations.

## Aims and objectives

The Call meets the following two objectives:

- To improve the understanding of how the FE sector and key stakeholders collect, provide and use data describing the FE workforce; and
- To identify how workforce data meets present and future requirements to inform the DfE's thinking on improvements that can be achieved in the coverage, quality and accessibility of data held on the FE workforce.

The latter bullet explains the exploratory nature of the Call. Specifically, the exercise is not a formal consultation (although such activity may form the next part of the DfE's thinking). Instead, the Call tests the water amongst those with an interest in FE workforce data, including those who already undertake the complex task of collecting [and presenting] data at the present time.

## Evidence Summary

The Call collected primary evidence from representatives of the FE sector via a mixed-methods approach. The main data collection tool was a semi-structure questionnaire hosted on the government's consultation and citizen engagement software platform, Citizen Space. A total of 121 people representing different sector viewpoints responded via the questionnaire.

Further supporting evidence was collected through telephone interviews with members of the Department for Education's (DfE)'s FE Sector Advisory Board, other sector stakeholders from unions, membership bodies, one research organisation, the DfE and learning providers. CFE researchers also attended two sector events to conduct short, five minute interviews with delegates ('vox pops').

Respondents were entirely self-selecting and the Call was not a statistically representative sample of the FE sector. Nine in ten of those completing the Call questionnaire represented a training provider and had "some responsibility to collect or provide data on their workforce to [internal teams] and/or external bodies." Provider representation was split evenly between those working for FE colleges and those working for independent training providers.

The purpose of the Call was to understand the breadth of views that exist in the sector about workforce data and how such data is, and could, be used. The Call also asked more detailed questions of those already responsible for the provision and/or collection of workforce data, and from those who actively use existing data for policy development, decision-making and strategic planning.

## Current value and use of workforce data

### Key findings on the importance of workforce data collection

- Nearly all Call respondents said collecting workforce data is important – 88% considered it to be at least "fairly important". Data collection was perceived to be of most importance for providers' workforce planning activities including: identifying skills gaps / shortages; monitoring and planning their workforce; addressing recruitment and retention issues; and planning training and professional development.
- Considering the value to the sector more widely, benchmarking providers' performance was also an important use, or potential use, of workforce data. Such benchmarking could yield value through provider-to-provider comparison, through comparing individual performance against data aggregated into sub-groups of provision, or against the sector as a whole.



- The perceived value of workforce data was reflected in current usage – around seven in ten respondents said workforce data currently plays at least “a fairly important role” in benchmarking a provider’s workforce against the sector, the strategic workforce planning of an organisation, and planning continuing professional development (CPD) activity.

## **Key findings on the scope of workforce data collection**

- Existing collection activity covers most types of staff in providers’ workforces - at least four fifths of respondents who administer / use workforce data said it is collected for each of the staff categories listed in the Call.
- Collectors and users of workforce data value the breadth of staff covered - at least four fifths said it is at least “fairly important” to collect data on all staff categories.
- In terms of the type of information held on staff in current data collections the coverage varies. According to Call respondents who collect / provide / use such datasets, around four fifths said personal demographic data, salary details or prior qualifications is collected but less than half said they collect details on vacancies / hard to recruit roles.
- A comparison of the type of workforce data collected and its perceived importance identifies an unmet interest in data on vacancies and hard to fill roles – over four fifths of Call respondents who collect / use workforce data felt this data was important but fewer than half collect it.

## **Key findings on the recognition and use of national workforce data collections**

- The most recognised national data collections, according to Call respondents, are the Staff Individualised Record (SIR) and the Annual Workforce Survey (AWS) - 69% and 60% respectively had heard of them.
- Half of respondents who collected or used these two data sources rated them as at least “fairly useful” (51% for the SIR and 48% for the AWS) although a quarter of these respondents said they do not use either source (25% and 27% respectively).
- Internal workforce data sources are considered by Call respondents collecting or using data to be more useful than external collections for understanding sector-wide workforce issues – 61% considered internal data to be at least “fairly useful” compared to 46% for the SIR and 45% for the AWS.

## The strengths and weaknesses of existing workforce data collections

- Respondents to the Call and those providing supporting information knew most about the SIR and hence most evidence refers to this specific dataset.
- The key strengths of the SIR is the open, public access to outputs and some datasets which are currently used as the basis for a number of different publications describing the FE workforce. The SIR is also currently used by some providers for benchmarking and comparative analysis to inform strategic and workforce planning.
- At present, the key stated weaknesses of the SIR concerned the coverage of the record. Coverage related to two aspects. Firstly, not all providers complete a SIR data return, and FE colleges are more likely than independent training providers to submit a return. Secondly, Call respondents said the data record from providers who did complete a return was not always complete which meant there were some gaps in the data. Providers said coverage issues limited the analytical value of the SIR and hence its value. Note these limitations also affect the perceived value of other collections such as the AWS.
- Providers' internal data collection was often able to remedy issues of data item coverage and hence the data collected about a provider's own provision was often said to be good. However, internal data often had limited value for strategic or competitive planning because the comparable data on the wider market was unavailable.

## How workforce data could be improved

### Data collection and timing

- Two-thirds of Call respondents expressed a preference for an annual data collection and that the collection cycle should be designed to minimise the administrative burden associated with the process. Unfortunately, there was no general consensus as to which part of the year was best as preferences differed with the administrative and management processes adopted by each provider.
- Three broad collection methods were stated as preferences:
  - Automated reporting systems draw existing data from payroll or management information to populate a data return. They make use of existing management information systems and reporting methods, but have the drawback of requiring some initial set up time to write the appropriate code to pre-populate data to common templates.
  - Some considered datasheets as convenient and easy to complete. In addition they create a consistent and standardised approach to extracting,

collating and recording data even where learning providers used a variety of staff human resources (HR) and management information systems. Their key drawback was the amount of data entry time required if not coupled with automated reporting systems which would populate a datasheet automatically. This data would need to be entered at each collection cycle and would be especially onerous for organisations employing large numbers of staff.

- Surveys or online methods to collect data were perceived as simple to adopt and administer and could record data not held on management systems easily. As with datasheets, they would require potentially significant data inputting time from provider staff to complete. An additional drawback is the lack of ability in some cases for the data inputter to view all of the survey questions at once to inform what information they need to provide.
- The main method proposed for minimising the data collection burden was prioritising which data was collected. Several Call respondents proposed collecting limited core workforce metrics frequently and less important data every two or three years.

## Improving the workforce data

- Around seven in ten Call respondents felt universal data coverage (ie data that included all providers with few gaps in the data record) would improve both the quality and coverage of the data return on several levels, notably in: benchmarking providers' performance against their peers; strategic planning; and monitoring workforce changes over time.
- Including all providers from different parts of the FE sector (FE colleges, independent training providers, local authority providers, etc.) would make data relevant, and therefore more valuable, to many more providers in the sector.
- There would need to be some associated changes to achieve this, notably ensuring the requested data on the workforce reflected the different staff composition of providers outside of the FE college group. This would mean using language and terminology more suited to independent training providers and ensuring the record was able to accurately capture details of contractors, temporary staff and specialists such as assessors, mentors, etc.
- The perceived value of a mandatory data collection was the delivery of a collection that, if not perfect, was far closer to a full picture of the whole FE workforce than is currently available.
- Some stakeholders also suggested increasing the breadth of data recorded to include better detail on roles and contractual data, views on why staff join and leave the sector and more data on the qualifications and employment

experiences of staff. However, these points should be considered within the context of the many Call respondents expressing concerns about administrative burden.

## Implementing improvements

- During the supporting work, some stakeholders suggested that existing data collection bodies, such as ETF and AoC, have worked hard to create solutions to data collection issues and barriers. Ensuring the lessons learned from these experiences was viewed as an important part of any potential improvements or changes to data collection processes. Any major changes should ideally be staged, to smooth implementation through piloting and testing activities. This would afford providers the time to adapt and introduce any necessary systemic changes. It could also provide time to engage smaller independent training providers, give more time to understand their specific concerns and hence design approaches that suit this group.
- Other stakeholders advocated targeted communications activity to “sell” the benefits of workforce data and demonstrate how it can add value to management and planning activity. Call respondents and those taking part in the supporting work felt part of this work could include offering the right sort of technical and administrative support to help providers. This included easing administrative burden via, for example, collective purchasing of HR software and data collection tools, or offering help in managing data quality and checking methods.

## Achieving a comprehensive workforce data collection

### Views on mandatory completion

- More than half of those responding to the Call were in favour of a mandatory data collection and a quarter were against; the remainder were undecided mostly because they wanted more detailed information on any proposed collection mechanism or approach.
- The key perceived benefits of a mandatory data collection were improving the representation, accuracy, value, and quality of data, and allowing for more comprehensive and detailed benchmarking / comparative analysis. Several union representatives felt a single, mandated collection could reduce the time learning providers invest in submitting responses to multiple requests.
- Call respondents felt that a mandatory census would improve the quality and breadth of workforce analysis and benchmarking because gaps in the data record would be (mostly) addressed.

- From a sector (as opposed to individual provider) perspective, Call respondents felt a census would allow better analysis on comparative performance, skills gaps and wider national, regional or local recruitment issues. Ultimately, better data should result in better FE policy.
- Administrative burden was the major concern, including for some Call respondents in favour of mandatory collection. A number of respondents felt that the sector already faces significant administrative burdens relating to data collection. In the case of small providers, the absence of HR staff could make responding to a mandated collection difficult to achieve.
- When weighing up the benefits and ease of implementing a mandatory data collection there are several, inter-related issues to consider. These include: the amount of data to be recorded, both in terms of the number of staff and the quantity of data held about them; the systems providers already have in place to record workforce data, for example, staff resources, mechanisms, and frequency of collection; and, the quality of data in terms of the breadth and depth of information collected versus its completeness.
- A staged approach to introducing compulsory collection could help alleviate some of the concerns regarding administrative burden.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Support for collecting workforce data on the whole of the FE sector was high. Nearly nine out of ten respondents to the Call said collecting such data was at least “fairly important.” Benchmarking, workforce planning and sector analysis were the principal ways in which respondents currently used workforce data and expected to do so in future. There were some gaps in the representation of current collections (the number of learning providers included and the lack of complete records from learning providers submitting data), and gaps in the coverage of data, eg vacancies data.

The Call respondents and interviewees were broadly positive about a mandatory data collection because it could address issues of data representation and coverage. However, there were pockets of providers, especially independent training providers, who were concerned about the consequences of mandatory collections. The central concern was administrative burden resulting from the time and resource implications for staff and infrastructure to provide the data returns. The respondents were in favour of annual data collections but preferences regarding data collection methods were varied.

*Consideration: A single solution is unlikely to reduce the administrative burden, however the following elements could lessen the pressure: a multi-method approach to collating data would offer some flexibility to learning providers to use the most appropriate method for their internal systems; a staged approach to introducing changes would enable learning providers to take time to set up the necessary systems; and, a highly-resourced support team could answer queries and quality check data from learning providers.*

Awareness of the SIR and AWS is relatively high as at least three in five Call respondents recognised these data collections. However, awareness was not universal (and tentatively lower amongst independent learning providers compared to FE colleges). Half of those responding to the Call found existing collections useful; the evidence could also suggest higher usage amongst FE colleges compared to independent training providers. A desire for better data exists and the utility of existing collections could be improved. Low representation within datasets limits the possibilities for comparative analysis; inconsistent data coverage means data cannot be interrogated to answer the right questions for all. However, many respondents recognised that such limits arise from voluntary data collections as opposed to deficiencies in the work of organisations collecting data.

*Consideration: To increase engagement from the underrepresented groups in the existing data sources, for example independent learning providers, develop a communications strategy to raise awareness about FE workforce data collection, demonstrate the relevance of the exercises to non-traditional learning providers, and make evident the benefits of workforce data findings with universal coverage.*

Significant development work has been carried out on existing data methods and, in the main, the likes of SIR and the AWS worked for many. Respondents said there are good lessons to learn from the processes whereby existing data is collected to inform the design of future collections.

*Consideration: Draw on the experience of current data collecting organisations to design and implement any changes to the workforce data collection. Organisations managing current collections possess knowledge of what works based on prior development activity, especially in recent times. Work closely with the under-represented groups to ensure the changes are feasible, reflect their resourcing needs and non-traditional workforce characteristics in order to gain their engagement. The membership bodies represented on the FE Research Advisory Board could provide an effective way of gaining collective feedback on any proposed changes and accessing exemplar providers with whom to consult from these sub-groups within the FE sector.*



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