



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills



Skills Funding
Agency

Statistical Policy Statement on Meeting User Needs through Engagement with Users

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires all producers of Official Statistics to publish transparent guidance on how user needs have been met through appropriate levels of engagement.

This paper describes how the Further Education & Skills Statistical First Release (SFR) complies with the seven practices outlined under Protocol 1 (User Engagement) of the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Planned work to improve compliance is also listed.

User Engagement

Practices

1. Identify Users

Analysis of enquiries to the Skills Funding Agency's Service Desk, alongside internal discussions has identified several different types of user of the SFR. Current identified users include:

- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) who use the statistics to report on ambitions; develop and monitor policies; and to answer parliamentary questions.
- Education Funding Agency (EFA) and Department for Education (DfE) who use the SFR to respond to requests for participation, achievement and success rates information from external partners and organisations.
- Skills Funding Agency (the Agency) who use the SFR for all statistics shared externally including press releases and for responding to requests from educational bodies such as sector skills councils and local bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) who use the SFR primarily for success rates information

- Researchers
- Media
- General public

The producers of the SFR engage users by collating suggestions gathered through the web site and email correspondence, inviting users to take part in surveys about the SFR, and inviting users to attend meetings where appropriate. Users who are not satisfied they are experiencing sufficient engagement are contacted to discuss improvements.

2. User Awareness

The Agency primarily uses the Government Statistics website to make users aware of the information available in the SFR.

Once the publication date and content of each SFR has been agreed (see practice [3] below for information) the Agency publishes the proposed publication date and template tables on the website that show which information will be published in the SFR, although these are not populated with statistics.

A number of supplementary tables are published with each SFR to complement the main tables and provide additional, more detailed information. The commentary and table footnotes in the SFR make clear where this additional information is located. A list of all supplementary tables available is published on the website stating the next update. Some tables are published alongside each SFR release while others are published annually. Tables are published in priority order with the highest priority ones being published on the same day of the release.

In addition, documents on the methodology and statistical protocols are available on the website. These are available in one section of the website to enable users to easily find the information they need.

The Agency's Service Desk is kept briefed on the statistics and information available in the SFR and accompanying tables. They process a large volume of queries directing users to the location of suitable information.

3. Users' Views

Prior to the Statistical First Release, the Agency hosts a data dissemination user group to discuss the presentation of statistics in the next SFR. The membership of the data dissemination user group consists of nominated individuals from Business Innovation and Skills and Skills Funding Agency

The calls received to the Service Desk are presented to the user group for review. The user group meetings cover various aspects of the SFR including

the statistical content and design of the tables. The priority order of developing tables is discussed and users are able to state their preferences and expectations. An increasing number of supplementary tables contained in the SFR are as a result of views from users.

The SFR web site and the SFR commentary invites users to contact the Service Desk if they have any comments about any element of the release however this has not yet resulted in significant amounts of feedback.

Before each release is published the statistics are thoroughly scrutinised by technical experts with pre-release access to ensure that their presentation is clear and meaningful for all users. The roles and responsibilities of the technical experts are available on the SFR website.

In March 2015 the SFR team launched an online survey asking for feedback about the SFR. A response to the feedback is published online (see [SFR Response To Feedback](#)).

4. Quality

Each SFR is published with a detailed commentary that includes information about the quality of the latest year's statistics, including comparability issues that exist due to changes in the sector (e.g. a change to the way learners are funded). The expected coverage and quality of data for the next SFR is also highlighted in each release. Important information on quality issues are reported in the 'Notes to Editors' section of each release. This includes information on the learning provision in and out of scope for the release, which should be known to fully understand the statistics reported.

Any specific issues with the quality of data returns used in SFRs are reported on the web site. Quality assessments against quality standards for source data are also published on the web site. These assessments detail the results of completeness checks on important fields in the ILR collections and allow judgements to be made on the validity of reporting official statistics with these fields.

A Revisions Policy is published on the SFR website detailing when and how revisions to existing releases are published, the impact they have on statistics and the process for ensuring the users are informed about the revisions.

A newsletter published by Agency, titled 'Inform', is used to inform the wider further education sector on news about data and statistics. If you wish to receive Inform, please email informnewsletter@sfa.bis.gov.uk

5. Evaluation of Experimental Statistics

Currently the SFR does not contain experimental statistics. If experimental statistics were to be made available in the SFR, the user group would be consulted to discuss and evaluate these statistics. Plans for new experimental statistics would be announced in the SFR area of the website. Key external customers would be contacted in order to seek comments and feedback on the planned approach.

6. Feedback

Feedback is sought from users through the SFR itself, and the SFR web site. Feedback is also logged through the Agency Service Desk.

Enquiries raised by users are logged and reviewed during the development phase of each SFR.

Each SFR is developed according to a high level plan that is informed by the needs of users. Releases are designed to ensure the data required by users is made available as soon as possible, subject to quality thresholds.

The SFR and accompanying supplementary tables are produced with the aim that they answer as many of the expected questions as is possible and the increasing provision of supplementary information is as a direct result of feedback from users

7. Consultation

Prior to each actual release near-final table templates (without any data) are published on the website, as discussed in practice (2). This is usually one month in advance of the publication date. This allows users an early sight of the proposed statistics for the next release and an opportunity to comment on the proposals.

Users will be consulted in the event of any major changes to the SFR.

Queries and Feedback

Any queries or feedback on this document should be forwarded to the service desk at the Skills Funding Agency. They can be contacted at ServiceDesk@sfa.bis.gov.uk

Version 2
April 2016
Next review date: Spring2017