Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) under the Mental Capacity Act 2005: data validation tool user guide

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Introduction

This document explains how to use the validation tool designed to assist councils in submitting data for the 2025 to 2026 DoLS data collection.

This tool replicates the validation work that the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) will do upon receipt of each council's data, prior to accepting it. Data submitters should use this to 'pre-validate' their data and to identify, locate and correct any issues that may exist.

The validation tool can be found alongside the [DoLS 2025 to 2026 data collection guidance and data template](#) on GOV.UK.

The validation tool is intended to assist you with making corrections to your return. It should not be solely relied upon to ensure the accuracy of your data. We always advise you to check your entries make sense alongside using the tool.

If you have any feedback, or experience any difficulties in using the validation tool, please contact us at asc.statistics@dhsc.gov.uk.

# How to use the DoLS validation tool

Ensure macros are enabled in Excel. If you are not sure how to do this, contact your IT department. Depending on your system settings, you may need to save the validation tool to your local folders.

Ensure that validation tool is the only workbook open. Close all other workbooks prior to the validation tool before running the process.

Click the 'Run' button on the 'Validation' worksheet to start the validation process.

A file dialog box will appear as shown below. Browse to the folder containing the file to be validated, click on the DoLS data file (DoLS 2025-26 data template) you wish to validate and then click the 'Select' button.

You will only be able to select Excel files. The validation tool is only programmed to analyse 2025 to 2026 DoLS data entered on the data template. Data files from earlier reporting years will not work correctly.
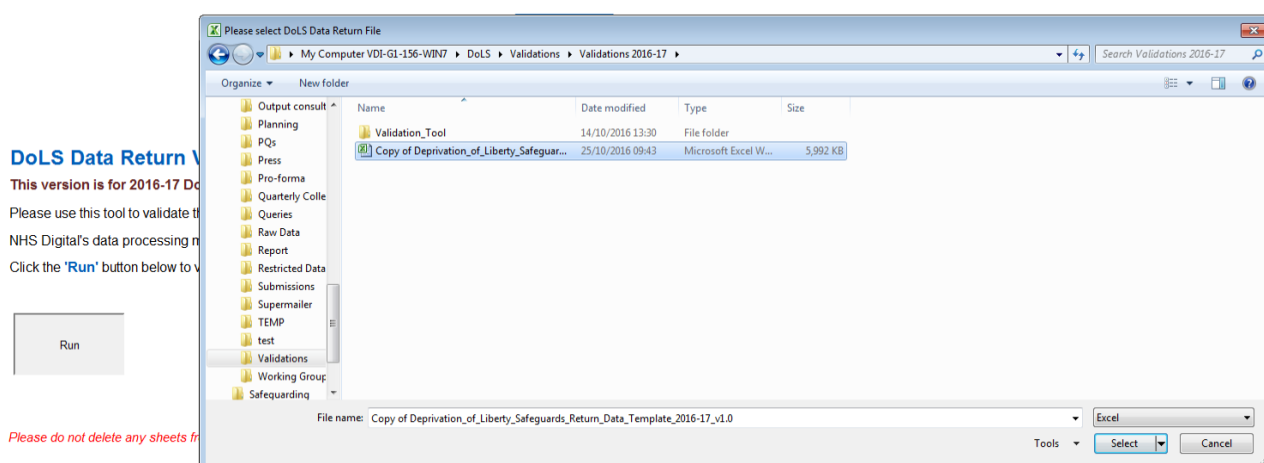

The validation process will now run. A message similar to the one below will be shown indicating the progress.
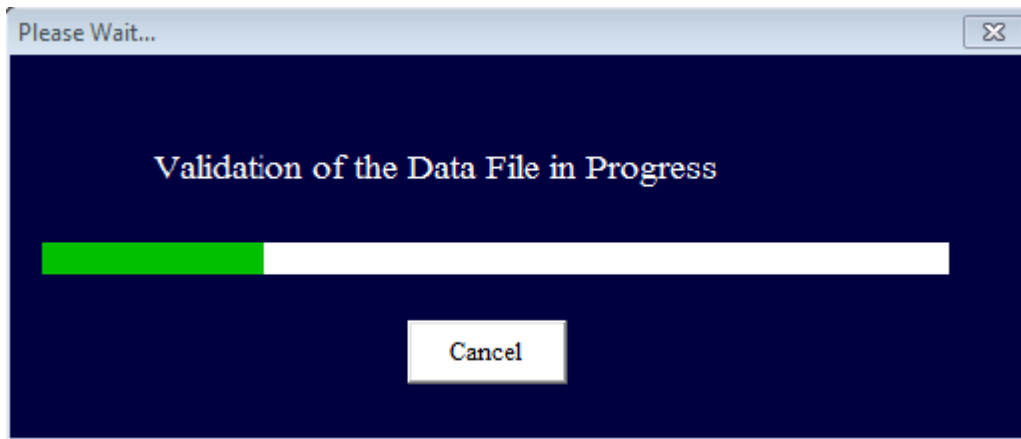
When the validation process is completed, a message will be shown based on whether the data file selected has passed or failed the validation. The file will be classed as failed if one or more issues are found.

A message similar to the one below will be shown if the data file has passed the validation.
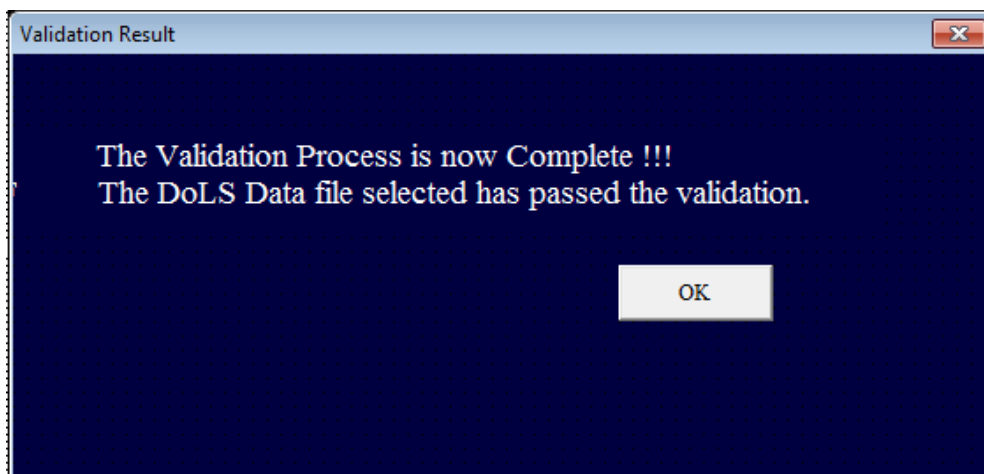
This message will be shown if the data file has failed the validation:
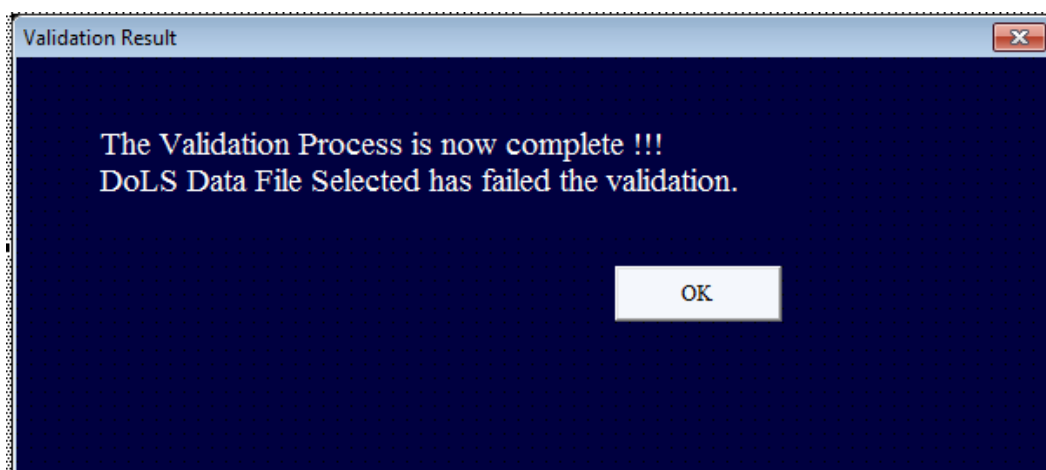
If the data file selected has failed validation, a new worksheet named 'DoLS' will be added to the validation tool after the 'Report' sheet, which will be a copy of the analysed DoLS file. This copy of the DoLS data will have all the cells that breached validation criteria highlighted in yellow, and the corresponding row will be highlighted in grey, to help users locate the issue.

Please refer to the DoLS sheet on the validation tool to identify the data which has failed the validation.

The validation workbook has the following work sheets:

- 'Validation' worksheet: this worksheet has the 'Run' button which you need to click to start the validation process.

- 'Summary' worksheet: this worksheet will be updated with the file name and the time the validation was run and will also have the summary of the validation process once it is completed. This sheet is intended to provide a quick summary of the data.

An example screenshot of the summary sheet is shown below.
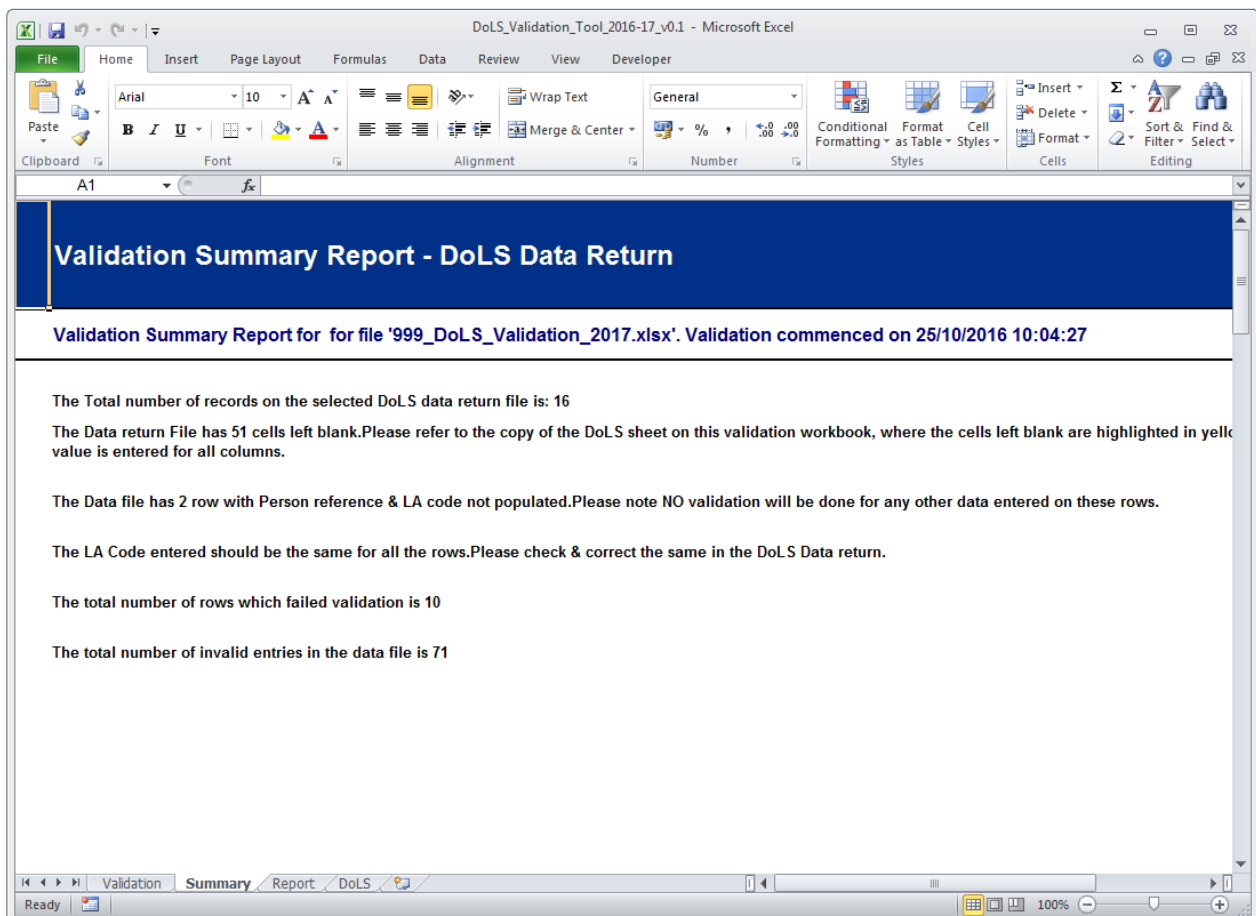
- 'Report' worksheet: this worksheet will be updated at the end of validation only if the data file has failed the validation. This sheet will have a list of all the records that failed the validation and detail the specific criteria that have been breached. The sheet can be filtered on the 'row number' to get all the errors for a specific row. The sheet will have the column 'error message' updated with error message for each cell which has failed the set validation criteria. This sheet is similar to the validation reports that we have issued in previous years.

An example screenshot of the 'Report' sheet is shown below:

- 'DoLS' worksheet: A new worksheet 'DoLS' will be added after the 'Report' sheet at the end of validation, which will be a copy of the actual DoLS sheet from the selected data file, if the data file has failed the validation. In this sheet all the cells which have failed validation will be highlighted in yellow and the corresponding row will be highlighted in grey. For each highlighted cell there will be an entry in the 'Report' sheet with the detailed error message.

Once you have saved the validation report sheets, if you want to re-run it, close and re-open the validation tool to reset it.

Please note that the 'DoLS' sheet in the validation workbook is just a copy, and should be used only as reference for identifying and highlighting errors. The validation errors should be fixed by making changes to your actual 2025 to 2026 DoLS data template.

Do not delete any sheets from the validation workbook.

Troubleshooting

Error message: 'File selected does not have a DoLS worksheet. Please select the DoLS data return file for validation'


The validation tool will only run successfully if the DoLS 2025-26 template has been selected. Ensure that you have downloaded the current year's template and that you are not using a previous year's template.

This message can also occur if you have renamed or deleted any of the sheets on the DoLS return template. You should download a new template and copy across your records.

Also, the sheet containing the DoLS data needs to be remain named as 'DoLS' or the above error will occur

Error message: 'There was an issue running the validation tool'
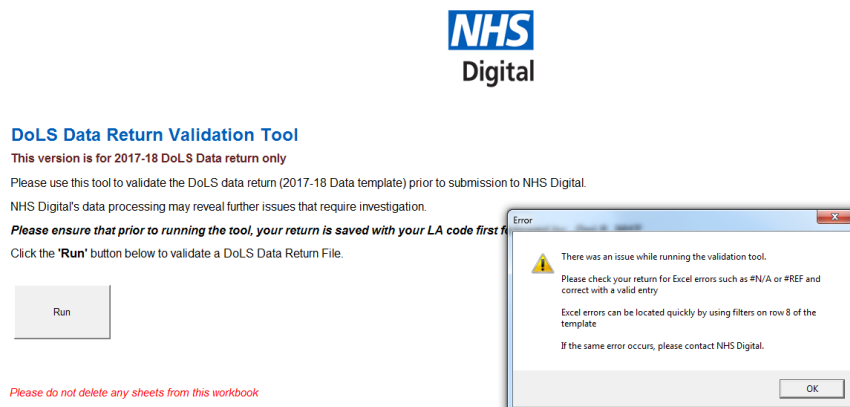
There are several reasons you may receive the error message 'there was an issue running the validation tool':

1. The most common reason for this error message is that there are rows in your return that have a blank 'Planned end date' with a space at the start of each cell which is throwing the validation tool. To fix this, filter your return to only bring back the rows with a 'blank' 'Planned end date' using the filter in cell U8. Then delete the contents of those cells.

2. Your data return may contain one or more excel errors, for example #N/A or #REF. The quickest way to identify these errors is by doing 'Ctrl and F' then typing in #. Or you can add filters to the columns and search that way.

3. The sheets within the validation tool have been altered in some way (for example, renamed or deleted). To ensure the tool runs as expected, do not make any changes to the tool.

4. The formulae within the template have been altered or deleted. This applies to the 'Application Reference' which is automatically calculated. If you have unprotected the template using the password, please be careful not to delete the formula within this column.

5. You may have blank 'Planned end date' cells that have a space at the start. To fix, just filter your return to only bring back the rows with a 'blank' 'Planned end date' using the filter in cell U8. Then delete the contents of those cells.