
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Dr Jo Saxton
Chief Regulator
Ofqual

2 December 2021

Dear Jo,

GRading and Admissions Dataset for England (GRADE)

I am writing to you to congratulate Ofqual, and the other organisations involved, on making the [GRading and Admissions Dataset for England \(GRADE\)](#) available to support research on the education, assessment and admissions systems. Making data available from 2017, 2018 and 2019, alongside data from 2020, shows commitment to transparency in relation to the awarding of grades in 2020, and willingness to gain insights on the impact on further education, higher education and employment and from the functioning of the system in years when exams are available. We are glad to see that the collaboration between Ofqual, Ofsted, Department for Education, UCAS and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) led to a successful outcome.

In December 2020 we welcomed the [announcement](#) that an advisory board had been created by Ofqual to oversee the data sharing project following the summer 2020 grading and highlighted it in our report, [Ensuring statistical models command public confidence – Learning lessons from the approach to awarding grades in the UK in 2020](#). As the regulator for statistics, we have been championing collaboration across organisations to enable data linkage to answer key questions about society and have been advocating for greater access to data for researchers. We believe that data sharing and data linking, with appropriate safeguards, are important to ensure that statistics serve the public good. It is a UK Statistics Authority strategic priority to make greater data available in a secure way for research and evaluation. Our 2018 report [Joining Up Data for Better Statistics](#) highlighted the importance of linking data to provide greater insights and our recent report [Defining Public Good in Applications to Access Public Data](#) demonstrates the range of public benefits data sharing can bring.

Your announcement of the data sharing project noted the technical challenges in making data available from separate organisations and linking them. It also noted the importance of safeguards in order to protect the rights of individual students. The fact that the data have been deposited in the ONS' [Secure Research Service](#) demonstrates the success of the collaboration in overcoming those challenges. We are pleased to see that funding has been made available via [ADR UK fellowships](#) to enable independent research of the impacts of summer 2020 awarding approaches on students and schools and that there is a commitment to make data relating to qualifications awarded in 2021 available in due course.

Making the GRADE data available via the Secure Research Service provides a wealth of potential insight into the achievements of young people and has huge potential to form the backbone for research analysis for many years to come.

I have copied this letter to Amanda Spielman (Chief Regulator, Ofsted and Chair of Ofqual Recovery Committee in 2020), Sir Ian Diamond (National Statistician and head of ONS), Susan Acland-Hood (Permanent Secretary, Department for Education) and Clare Marchant (Chief Executive, UCAS).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation