

Assessment of compliance with the Code of
Practice for Statistics

Key Stage 4 performance statistics for England

(produced by the Department for Education)

Office for Statistics Regulation

We provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK. Statistics are an essential public asset. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards they must meet in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We ensure that producers of government statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the **Code**. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value. We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

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Executive Summary

Why we carried out this assessment

- ES.1 This assessment considered the [Key Stage 4 \(KS4\) Performance statistics](#) for England published by the Department for Education (DfE). It also considered the elements of the [Compare School Performance](#) website that relate to KS4 performance.
- ES.2 Our assessment found widespread good practice in the production of the KS4 statistics. We have identified four actions for DfE to fulfil in order for the statistics to continue to be designated as National Statistics.
- ES.3 DfE has committed to making improvements to the statistical bulletin on the impact on COVID-19 for the 2021/22 release (requirement 2) and on the distinction of the accountability measures for the 2022/23 release (requirement 1). The team will also increase the breadth of its stakeholder engagement and share more information publicly on the KS4 development plans (requirement 3) as well as publishing an update on the ICO audit before the 2022/23 release (requirement 4).

Key Findings

- ES.4 Overall we found good compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Aspects of the statistics demonstrate strong examples of good practice. For example, user engagement, commentary, quality and data linkage and sharing. We found that there are a few areas where improvements could further support the Trustworthiness, Quality and Value of these statistics.
- ES.5 Ministers monitor the education system and hold schools to account through the use of accountability measures. These accountability measures are reported with other performance and contextual information in the KS4 statistical bulletin. Although the statistics are reported on impartially, it may not always be clear to users within the statistical bulletin which statistics relate to the accountability measures and which statistics relate to KS4 performance more broadly. The Head of Profession for Statistics has stated that he would be willing to consider alternative ways of presenting the KS4 statistics to make the responsibilities clearer and support trust in the statistics.

Requirement 1: Improve the distinction between the KS4 accountability measures and the wider KS4 statistics by investigating and implementing changes to the presentation of the statistics in the statistical bulletin.

- ES.6 Users reported that the level of quality of the statistics was very good and were generally happy with the level of information provided about the limitations, coherence and comparability in past releases. Where users did have concerns, these mostly related to the upcoming 2021/22 release. There have been a number of significant changes to the KS4 statistics over the last few years due to the effects of COVID-19 which mean that not all of the data can be compared over time. It is essential that the 2021/22 release contains comprehensive information on the strengths and limitations of the KS4 statistics and that it is clear which comparisons can be made.

Requirement 2: Ensure users are appropriately informed about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the upcoming 2021/22 release and that they are able to draw their own reliable conclusions from the KS4 performance data by providing

comprehensive information on the strengths and the limitations of the statistics and the appropriate comparisons that can be drawn.

- ES.7 DfE has a comprehensive understanding of the different users of the KS4 statistics. DfE aims to meet the needs of these different users through providing different statistical products, such as the statistical bulletin, data downloads and the Compare School Performance website. DfE is in regular contact with its key users and receives feedback from them regarding the statistics. However, it is not always clear what the level of engagement is beyond these key users. It would be of benefit to the statistics if a wider range of users was consistently given the opportunity to input into proposed changes and priorities. Most users reported that they were able to get requested data from DfE relatively easily, however a small number reported struggling with this and that they felt that they had to raise formal requests under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act in order to get the data rather than being able to engage with DfE less formally to get their needs met.

Requirement 3: Ensure users are at the centre of the statistical production process by engaging effectively with the widest possible audience through sharing more information publicly on the development plans for the KS4 performance statistics and by working closely with users to meet their needs.

- ES.8 Data sharing and data linkage are particular strengths of the KS4 performance statistics in terms of providing value. The data are uploaded to the National Pupil Database which allows for further linkage and analysis by expert users. DfE provides many shares of these data for multiple purposes. In October 2020 the ICO published a summary of its Data Protection Audit for the Department for Education. Adherence to these recommendations will support DfE with maintaining compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. In January 2021, DfE published an initial response to the audit and a further update is currently awaited.

Requirement 4: Ensure public confidence in its data governance procedures, by publishing an update on progress with meeting the recommendations of the ICO audit that relate to the Code of Practice for Statistics and providing assurance that all data governance requirements are being adhered to.

Background

1. The KS4 performance statistics for England are published on an annual basis by the Department for Education (DfE). The statistics are based on GCSE results, as well as a small set of vocational qualifications, which are linked to demographic information from the [School Census](#) that takes place in January each year, as well as Key Stage 2 (KS2) performance data which are used to breakdown KS4 results by prior attainment and to calculate [Progress 8](#) scores.
2. There are four components to the KS4 statistics which we considered as part of this assessment:
 - a. The [statistical bulletin](#) which provides commentary and headline figures
 - b. The [downloadable data files](#)
 - c. The [table building](#) service
 - d. The school-level KS4 performance measures which are included on the [Compare School Performance website](#)

3. The statistics were [last assessed](#) against the Code of Practice for Statistics in 2014. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic we had planned to add an assessment of these statistics to our work programme. Due to the changes to the way that grades were awarded in 2020 and 2021, and the pressures that the statistical system was under, we delayed the assessment. Due to the return to grades being awarded via examinations and the importance of these statistics to understanding the long-term impacts of the pandemic on groups of pupils, we started this assessment in January 2022.
4. As part of the evidence for this assessment we conducted 28 interviews with a range of key users within Government and across the wider education profession. We also conducted an online questionnaire to gather views on the statistics from a wider range of users. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions and collected information such as user's satisfaction with different aspects of the statistics. The online questionnaire received 100 useable responses and the analysis is included in [Annex A](#).
5. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 and 2021 KS4 releases presented a slightly reduced set of statistics. Specifically, Progress 8 measures were not published during these years and the school level website was not updated in 2020 and only figures for English Baccalaureate (EBacc) entry, entries and pupil destinations after KS4 and 16-18 study were published in 2021.
6. The KS4 statistics have undergone several changes in recent years. These have been made in response to:
 - a. The cancellation of summer exams as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of centre-assessment grades in 2019/20 and teacher-assessed grades in 2020/21 to award grades.
 - b. A phased introduction of reformed GCSEs on a 9-1 scale, which first fed into the statistics in 2017.
 - c. The introduction of new accountability measures including Progress 8 (which replaced the previous headline measure 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths) and Attainment 8 in 2016, as well as the percentage of pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths in 2017.
 - d. Changes to the way in which pupils are allocated to KS2 prior attainment groups in order to calculate Progress 8.

Impartiality and Independence

7. The Trustworthiness pillar of the Code of Practice for Statistics sets out that users should have confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics. Two key elements of this in relation to KS4 performance statistics are the impartiality of the commentary in the bulletin and the independence of the decision making around which measures are published.
8. The users that we spoke to reported that the statistics are presented clearly and impartially and that the narrative in the statistical bulletin aided them to interpret the data. No concerns were raised with us around the impartiality of the commentary in the bulletin. Based on responses from 100 users who responded to our online questionnaire, satisfaction with the impartiality of the statistics scored the second

highest rating of the ten elements that we asked about (see [Annex A](#) for more information).

9. Ministers have a responsibility to monitor the education system and to hold schools to account. This is achieved through the use of accountability measures, the choice of which is made by ministers in line with current priorities. These accountability measures are reported along with a range of other performance and contextual information in the statistical bulletin (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. KS4 statistics

Accountability measures

Determined by: DfE Ministers

Primary use: Used by Government to hold schools accountable

Includes:

- Attainment 8 – attainment across 8 qualifications
- Attainment in English and maths – percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in English and maths
- Progress 8 – progress across 8 qualifications
- EBacc entry – percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate
- EBacc APS – English Baccalaureate Average Point Score
- Pupil destinations – percentage of students staying in education or going into employment after KS4

Wider performance and contextual information

Determined by: DfE statisticians

Primary use: To provide users with additional contextual information

Includes:

- Disadvantage attainment gap index
- Breakdowns by pupil characteristics:
 - Disadvantage
 - English as an additional language
 - Special Educational Needs (SEN)
 - Ethnicity
 - Gender
 - KS2 prior attainment
 - Local Authority

10. The accountability measures are designed to be used to inform parents and students about school performance and support school choice, to enable schools to monitor their own performance and guide improvements, to inform the public and stakeholders, and to provide information on underperformance so that action can be taken.
11. The wider KS4 performance statistics are used for a range of purposes, such as understanding the differences in attainment between sub-groups with different characteristics, research by academics, and by DfE to inform education policies.
12. Concerns were raised through the interviews we conducted and in our online questionnaire around the use of Progress 8 as well as the EBacc set of subjects for the key accountability measures. Specifically, users reported that Progress 8 could be difficult to understand and that it did not take into account contextual information.

Several users commented on the removal of the contextual value added measure that had previously been available which, in their opinion, provided a more balanced view of schools performance than Progress 8.

13. The KS4 statistics team explained to us that there is a difference between the purpose of the KS4 statistical release and the KS4 metrics included on the Compare School Performance website. The KS4 statistical release (consisting of the bulletin, data downloads and table building tool) aims to provide a broad view of KS4 performance in England and includes the headline accountability measures, additional performance measures and contextual information. In comparison, the Compare School Performance website has been designed for users to be able to view information on KS4 performance for individual schools and presents the accountability measures as well as some contextual information.
14. The publication of the accountability measures at a national, regional and local level provides helpful information and allows users to contextualise a school's performance. Although the statistics are reported on impartially, it may not always be clear to users within the statistical bulletin which statistics relate to the accountability measures, and thus are determined by ministers, and which statistics relate to KS4 performance more broadly.
15. Where users have concerns about the political nature of the accountability measures, these are often extended to all KS4 statistics. In order to support trust in the statistics, it is important for users to be able to easily understand the purpose of each statistic and how they were chosen and developed.
16. The Head of Profession for Statistics has stated to us that he would be willing to consider alternative ways of presenting the KS4 statistics to make the responsibilities clearer and support trust in the statistics.

Requirement 1: Improve the distinction between the KS4 accountability measures and the wider KS4 statistics by investigating and implementing changes to the presentation of the statistics in the statistical bulletin.

Quality and clarity

17. The KS4 statistics are produced using several sources of administrative data including GCSE results and vocational qualifications from awarding bodies, demographic information from the School Census and KS2 performance data. DfE has published a wide range of information available on its methodologies and the quality checks that it carries out. Much of this information can be found on [the KS4 methodology page](#) and some of it can be found in standalone documents, for example [How Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures are calculated](#).
18. DfE appears to have robust and detailed quality assurance checks in place and information on these is included in the methodology documents. Users that we spoke to stated that the quality of the statistics was very good and that they were generally happy with the information provided about the limitations, coherence and comparability. 'Level of Quality' scored the highest level of satisfaction in our online questionnaire, however respondents were less satisfied with 'Advice about strengths and limitations' which score the second lowest out of the ten aspects that we asked about.
19. A strength of the KS4 statistics is that they are based on administrative data which offer reliable granularity and the possibility to merge the data with other

administrative data held by DfE to provide detailed information on sub-groups of the population. However, there are some limitations of the data sources that are not fully explained to users such as population coverage or potential biases. Examples include the proportion of awarding bodies that provide data to DfE and any potential biases resulting from this, and information on the populations excluded from the statistics. DfE has processes in place to mitigate the impact of any limitations and we consider that those listed above do not affect the quality of the data, only that users should be able to easily find information on them. We would encourage DfE to provide clearer information around any potential limitations to users so that they are able to draw their own reliable conclusions from the data.

20. The statistics are released alongside an accompanying commentary as part of the statistical bulletin, which presents high-level measures with contextual information. The bulletin is clearly written with distinct sections, and the figures are presented in interactive charts, which users report are easy to interpret. Summary tables are included, which allow users to see the statistics without having to download additional tables. Users were largely positive about the commentary that accompanies the KS4 statistics and we found the bulletin to be a strong example of statistical presentation.
21. At the top of the statistical bulletins, DfE provides information on the corrections that it has made to the statistics since publication. This includes descriptions of the specific statistics that have been corrected along with explanations of why the changes have been made. It would also be useful if more detail was included about the scale and the impact of the changes that have been made in order to maintain users' trust in the data.
22. Overall, users were very happy with the amount of underlying data that DfE makes available through the data downloads and through the table building tool. However, a common theme that was raised was the lack of consistency across historical data. For instance, users reported that the name of some variables in the datasets change from year to year, making it difficult to conduct a longitudinal analysis without additional data processing.
23. DfE is aware from its own user research that the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures can be difficult for some users to interpret. The introduction of the new accountability measures such as Progress 8 and the discontinuation of previous accountability measures has made it difficult to compare school performance over time due to the break in the time series. Whilst DfE has published detailed information on how [Progress 8 is calculated](#), the document contains little information on the limitations of this metric.
24. Where users did have concerns about the quality of the KS4 data and the methodology information provided, these mostly related to the upcoming 2021/22 release. There have been a number of significant changes to the KS4 statistics over the last few years due to the effects of COVID-19 which mean that not all of the statistics can be compared over time. Users are concerned about the return of Progress 8 in 2022 and highlighted that the publication will need to be appropriately caveated.
25. It is essential that the 2021/22 release contains comprehensive information on the strengths and limitations of the KS4 performance statistics and that it is clear which comparisons can be made. We are aware that DfE has already been undertaking user research to inform the best way to present this information.

Requirement 2: Ensure users are appropriately informed about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the upcoming 2021/22 release and that they are able to draw their own reliable conclusions from the KS4 performance data by providing comprehensive information on the strengths and the limitations of the statistics and the appropriate comparisons that can be drawn.

User engagement

26. The KS4 performance statistics are used for a wide range of purposes and DfE has a comprehensive understanding of the different users of the statistics as outlined in the 'About the output' section on the [KS4 performance methodology page](#).
27. DfE aims to meet the needs of different users through providing different statistical products. The first of these is the statistical bulletin which provides a commentary as well as interactive elements. The second product is the downloadable data files and the third product is the table building tool which is available for all releases on the Explore Education Statistics (EES) platform. The fourth product is the KS4 school-level data provided on the Compare School Performance website.
28. DfE is in regular contact with its key users and receives feedback from them regarding the statistics. DfE also provides contact details for users to submit their feedback. The views from users are addressed where possible, for example, DfE has recently introduced more-detailed breakdowns for ethnicity at local authority (LA) level.
29. DfE conducts regular user research on the Compare School Performance website. This enables DfE to systematically test aspects of the website and the statistics presented. This research has been valuable in understanding how users interpret the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures and identifying improvements that can be made to their presentation.
30. Although the key users that we interviewed were generally satisfied with their engagement with DfE, this was not fully reflected in the online user questionnaire (see [Annex A](#)). While some users reported that DfE had been quick to respond to their queries and that the information had been useful, other respondents raised several issues with their interactions with DfE. These included: long delays between responses or no response at all; and queries being passed to multiple different teams or people. Most users reported that they were able to get requested data from DfE relatively easily, however a small number reported that they felt that they had to raise formal requests under the FOI Act in order to get the data rather than being able to engage with DfE more informally. DfE should consider how it can better engage with these types of users to ensure that their needs are met.
31. DfE is currently in the process of engaging with key users and stakeholders to discuss their proposed changes for the 2022 publication. Examples of planned changes as a result include the structure of the institution pages on the Compare School Performance website and clear guidance around how to interpret the data. These changes will help communicate the impact that the pandemic has had on the KS4 data and methods and the appropriate comparisons that can be drawn.
32. DfE is planning to refresh its user engagement strategy in light of the wider GSS work on user engagement in statistics, and reflecting its plans to use a variety of feedback mechanisms to understand how users interact with its statistics, and what information they need. We encourage the KS4 statistical team to use the updated

DfE engagement strategy as a basis to update the KS4 statistics user engagement strategy. We would also encourage the KS4 statistical team to consider new and innovative ways in which it could engage with users or promote the statistics to increase awareness of the statistics and communicate effectively with the widest possible audience.

33. The Code of Practice for Statistics sets out that statistics producers should collaborate with other producers within the UK. DfE works closely with The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) and The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), who publish related statistics, to ensure that the key messages are coherent across the different publications. Although the comparisons that can be made across the different countries in the UK are limited due to the devolution of education, there are potential benefits to be gained from sharing best practice and knowledge. We welcome the KS4 statistics team's plan to engage more regularly with the devolved administrations.
34. DfE provides detailed advance notice about changes to methods, often consulting with the public and expert users on proposals. For example, Progress 8 and Attainment 8 were introduced following a consultation on [secondary school accountability](#) in 2013. Where possible, DfE has provided a consistent time series, for example following the introduction of the [disadvantaged pupil gap index](#).
35. DfE has a detailed work programme for KS4 statistics. However, information on this is not always shared beyond its key users. The Code of Practice for Statistics states that statistics producers should be open about progress towards meeting priorities and objectives and that users and other stakeholders should be involved to help priorities statistical plans. We would encourage DfE to make more information available regarding the development plans for the KS4 statistics so that all users are kept informed. It would also allow a greater number of users to be involved in the ongoing development of the statistics which will help to maximise public value from this rich and important data source.

Requirement 3: Ensure users are at the centre of the statistical production process by engaging effectively with the widest possible audience through sharing more information publicly on the development plans for the KS4 performance statistics and by working closely with users to meet their needs.

Data linkage and sharing

36. Through conversations with users and our own research we identified that data sharing and data linkage are particular strengths of the KS4 performance statistics in terms of providing value. The KS4 data themselves are produced by linking KS4 exam results to KS2 attainment and the School Census. The data are also uploaded to the [National Pupil Database](#) which allows for further linkage and analysis by expert users.
37. DfE provides many shares of these data for multiple purposes as can be seen through its [data shares transparency releases](#). These shares enable a greater understanding of the interactions between different aspects of children's lives, the impact of these on attainment and the impact of attainment on later outcomes. They also help to inform policy within DfE and in other departments.
38. One specific example of a data linkage and share for the public good that uses the KS4 performance data is the Grade and Admissions Dataset for England. In

December 2021 [we wrote](#) to congratulate Ofqual, DfE, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) for their involvement in making a linked dataset available to support research on the education, assessment and admissions systems. Making data available from 2017, 2018 and 2019, alongside data from 2020, showed a 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. This was an excellent example of collaboration with other producers, overcoming practical obstacles, and sharing best practice. Other data linkages and shares include the [Ministry of Justice/DfE data share](#), the [ECHILD project](#) and [Longitudinal Educational Outcomes study](#).

39. During our conversations with users, they praised the access that they receive to the underlying KS4 performance data. However, several users raised issues around the length of time that it takes to get access to the datasets on the [Secure Research Service](#) (SRS), citing that this can substantially delay projects. The SRS is hosted by ONS and enables accredited or approved researchers to securely access de-identified data in order to conduct research projects for the public good. Over the past five years DfE has done substantial work to streamline and speed up the processes involved in making data available to accredited researchers. However, the process necessarily involves consideration by a data approval panel and processes to ensure that each researcher is not inadvertently provided access to multiple datasets that could enable identification of individuals. DfE takes the confidentiality of its data very seriously and so there is a specific process to produce each dataset for the SRS. Because of this, linked datasets requests are more complicated, requiring approval from multiple organisations, and do take longer.
40. In October 2020 the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) published a summary of its [Data Protection Audit for the Department for Education](#). In a [statement](#) on the audit ICO said 'The audit found that data protection was not being prioritised and this had severely impacted the DfE's ability to comply with the UK's data protection laws. A total of 139 recommendations for improvement were found, with over 60% classified as urgent or high priority.'
41. The ICO audit looked at DfE as a whole and the recommendations covered several different areas. Although the KS4 statistics are not specifically referenced in the report, they are affected by some of the recommendations which relate to privacy information provided to data subjects and the processes around approvals for data sharing. Adherence to these recommendations will support DfE with maintaining compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics, specifically that 'Organisations should look after people's information securely and manage data in ways that are consistent with relevant legislation and serve the public good' and that 'The rights of data subjects must be considered and managed at all times in ways that are consistent with data protection legislation'.
42. In addition to the ICO audit, concerns have previously been raised with us on the data governance procedures around the National Pupil Database (NPD) which consists of data from multiple sources including KS4 performance data. In order for people to have confidence in DfE's data governance procedures they must be seen to be adhering to all relevant legislation. In January 2021 DfE published an initial [response](#) to the audit and a further update is awaited.

Requirement 4: Ensure public confidence in its data governance procedures, by publishing an update on progress with meeting the recommendations of the ICO audit that relate to the Code of Practice for Statistics and providing assurance that all data governance requirements are being adhered to.

Use of Technology

43. In March 2020, DfE launched its new EES platform. This platform embeds the statistical bulletin into HTML which enables users to interact with the charts and tables and to more easily navigate the commentary, compared with a static PDF document. The bulletin is a strong example of best practice in statistical presentation.
44. The EES platform also hosts new functionality to explore the underlying data and create bespoke tables. Users can build their own data tables by selecting from over 20 subjects such as 'KS4 local authority data', the geographic region, over 70 indicators, the time period they want to look at, and characteristic options such as gender. The implementation of EES has enabled DfE to improve its data presentation, enhance insight, and better meet the needs of different types of users.
45. Most users reported that they found EES relatively easy to use although some reported that the number of options could be overwhelming at first. Some users flagged that it wasn't always clear what data were available, which could result in blank tables being generated. We also heard from some users that the metadata could be difficult to navigate as they were provided in a separate text file.
46. The EES platform includes metrics that allow DfE to see how users interact with the statistics including which datasets they download, and which variables are most commonly used in the bespoke tables. This information will allow DfE to make improvements to the presentation of the statistics on a continuous basis.
47. The Code of Practice for Statistics states that statistics and data should be released using accessible communication formats. The accessibility of the KS4 statistics greatly increased following the migration to the EES platform. Although EES is not yet fully compliant with accessibility standards (as outlined in DfE's [accessibility statement](#)), DfE continues to test the service for accessibility issues and to work on resolving issues. We welcome DfE's ongoing commitment to improving the accessibility of all their statistics.
48. Users were generally positive about the KS4 statistics included on the Compare School Performance website however some issues were raised including the level of information provided to users on metrics such as Attainment 8 and Progress 8 to aid their interpretation. DfE is currently investigating possible changes to mitigate these issues.
49. The KS4 statistics team is working to automate more of its systems and are making use of innovative technologies such as Power BI and R. In addition, the team has adopted the principles of Reproducible Analytical Pipelines as set out in our [recent review](#). This will help improve the efficiency of the production of the statistics and further reduce the risk of human error.

Annex A – Analysis of user questionnaire

Introduction

The aim of the KS4 user survey was to collect information from a wide range of users to supplement the information that we had gathered from our user interviews.

The KS4 user survey went live on the OSR website on 2 February 2022 and was open until 31 March 2022. The survey consisted of eight questions about the KS4 statistics designed for a range of users. The survey was a non-random sample, and we aimed to gather responses from a wide range of users to ensure that the responses were as broad as possible. The questionnaire was publicised on the OSR twitter account, and the link was included in articles by the Times Educational Supplement (TES) and [Schools Week](#). We also contacted around 170 potential users informing them of the survey.

At the time of closing the survey we had received 108 responses. Following data cleaning eight responses were removed due to being test entries or duplicates, this left 100 responses which we then analysed. This annex presents the number of responses we received for certain questions but does not include potentially identifiable responses.

Question analysis

Question 1 – How do you usually access or view the DfE KS4 performance statistics? (tick all that apply)

The majority of respondents accessed the statistics through the GOV.UK website, a large proportion also read the release and created their own tables through EES.

How do you usually access or view the DfE KS4 performance statistics?	Responses
Gov.uk website	71
DfE website – Explore Education Statistics (read the release)	59
DfE website – Explore Education Statistics (create your own tables)	50
The media	13
Someone else provides them to me	8
Social media	4
Other (please specify)	12

Question 2 – Which of the statistics or datasets do you use?

The majority of respondents used Attainment 8, the headline facts and figures and Progress 8. A large number of respondents also use achievement of grade 5 and above in English and Maths, attainment broken down by personal characteristics, and disadvantage gap.

Which of the statistics or datasets do you use?	Responses
Attainment 8	86
Headline facts and figures	85

Progress 8	83
Achievement of grade 5 and above in English and Maths	77
Attainment broken down by personal characteristics	74
Disadvantage gap	73
Local Authority tables	58
EBacc entry and subjects entered	56
Institution level data available through Compare School and College Performance (CSCP) service	41
KS2 to 4 Transition Matrices	36
Underlying data [please specify]	34
Multi-academy trust data	23
Other [please specify]	8

The majority of answers provided for 'Other' related to users downloading the underlying data to conduct their own analysis using variables such as Special Educational Needs (SEN), Ethnicity, and Free School Meals.

Question 3a – What do you use the data for?

The majority of respondents use the data to explore the differences in attainment between groups of pupils, understanding trends in educational attainment and comparing schools in a single local authority. A large proportion also used them to compare their own school to others, exploring progress made by pupils between KS2 and KS4, and communicating the statistics to others.

What do you use the data for?	Responses
Exploring differences in attainment between groups of pupils	78
Understanding trends in educational attainment	69
Comparing schools in local authority	62
Comparing own school(s) to others	59
Exploring progress made by pupils between KS2 and KS4	56
Communicating the statistics to others	53
Comparing attainment between local authorities	42
Further research	32
Making choices about schools	12
Holding your/ your child's school to account	10
Other [please specify]	8

Question 3b – Please provide further information on your reasons for this use

Users reported a wide range of reasons for using the KS4 data, common reasons included:

- Used by central and local government (including LAs) to inform decision making and monitor progress

- Used by schools to monitor their own performance
- Used to compare schools against other schools and at LA and national level
- Used by companies who provide advice or information to schools
- Used by researchers to conduct their own analysis, for example into inequalities.

Question 4a – How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the statistics?

Respondents gave the highest ratings on average for the level of quality, how clearly the statistics are presented, and impartiality. Respondents gave the lowest ratings on average for the ability to build your own tables and charts, advice about strengths and limitations, and ease of access to raw data for reuse.

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the statistics?	Average score /10
Level of Quality	6.5
How clearly are the statistics are presented	6.5
Impartiality	6.4
Use of pre-populated tables and charts	6.2
Ease of access to the statistics	6.2
Description of trends/ patterns (known as commentary)	5.8
Information on the methodology	5.5
Ability to build your own tables and charts	5.3
Advice about strengths and limitations	5.2
Ease of access to raw data for reuse	5.1

Question 4b – Please provide any comments that can help us understand your rating of these aspects of the statistics

Users reported a wide range of reasons for their ratings. Common reasons included:

- Concerns over the publication of 2022 data and whether the limitations will be clear
- The build your own table functionality in EES – some users were in favour of this and felt it gave them more flexibility, others found the platform difficult to use and reported that not all of the data/variables they needed were available on there
- Lack of contextual information for the headline accountability measures including information on other factors that influence academic performance
- Issues with the data
 - Understanding of differences between the statistics produced by DfE and those produced by JCQ and Ofqual
 - Lack of consistency in the data structure and variable names year on year in datasets
 - Lack of clarity and availability of trust level and Alternative Provider school data
- Several users expressed that there had been an improvement to the presentation of the statistics over the last few years as well as the commentary around them.
- Users also raised wider issues around the context of the statistics, including:
 - The focus on EBacc subjects which can result in students being pressured to take these subjects, also issues around the weighting and groupings of the subjects

- The use of them to compare schools
- The pressure they add to schools and teachers

Question 5 – What improvements to statistics on this topic would help you and why?

Respondents had a wide range of suggestions for improvements to the statistics, including:

- Improved metadata for the data files and being able to easily see which variables are in the files and their descriptions before downloading.
- More contextual information on socioeconomic factors
- More consistency year-on-year of the variables made available to users
- More information on the methods used including data linkage and Progress 8
- Additional breakdowns of the data such as ethnicity, the ability to combine several vulnerability variables and information on each specific subject
- Easier access to LA-level data, including being able to select all the LAs at once to download

Question 6 – Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about these statistics?

The response to this question were mixed with some respondents highlighting positive aspects of the statistics such as the improvements that have been made over the last few years, how clear the main points and summary tables are and the impartiality of the presentation. Other respondents were concerned about the decision to publish Progress 8 in 2022.

Questions 7a-c – Contact with DfE

Users were asked a number of questions about their contact with DfE. Almost half of users (43) had raised queries with DfE about the statistics.

Questions 7a – 7c	Yes
7a. Have you requested additional data?	26
7b. Have you raised queries with DfE about these statistics?	43
7c. Have you been contacted by DfE about changes/ improvements to these statistics?	12

Question 7d – Satisfaction with DfE contact

In general users were not highly satisfied with how DfE responded to them with an average score of 4.9/10.

	Average score /10
7d. How satisfied were you with how DfE responded to you?	4.9

Question 7e – Please provide any comments that can help us understand your rating

Some users reported that DfE has been quick to respond to their queries and that the information had been useful. Other respondents raised several issues with their interactions with DfE, these included:

- Long delays between responses or no response at all

- Difficulty in getting data corrected after it has been raised with DfE
- Queries being passed to multiple different teams or people
- No ability to speak to DfE other than through email
- Some users reported having to raise a FOI requests to get the data they had requested

Question 8 – Work sector

Users indicated which work sector that best describes they work in (note – some users selected more than one). Most respondents classified themselves as a teacher/ head teacher/ governor/ trust leader or part of local government.

Work sector	Count
Teacher/ head teacher/ governor/ trust leader	35
Local government	25
Parent	11
Academic/ researcher	11
Central government	8
Charity/ think tank	8
Other [please specify]	15

