



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Data Strategy 2024-27

June 2024

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Foreword

It is a real pleasure to welcome the publication of the 2024-27 Data Strategy of the Department of Education. Data is vital to all that we do in education. It helps us to make informed decisions, assists us as we shape policy and guide practice, and underpins key operations including student enrolment, forward planning, teacher allocations, payroll, pensions, transport...the list goes on.

Recognising this, staff across every section of the department and colleagues in agencies and representative groups across the country became actively involved in the development of this strategy. Its priorities, goals and actions are rooted in conversations, workshops, research, expert advice and written submissions gathered over the past year. As a community, we gained a sense of where we are with respect to data and agreed, collectively, our best next steps.

This strategy builds on progress made under the department's 2017 Data Strategy and focuses, in particular, on strengthening our data governance structures and processes, uplifting our data literacy and culture, monitoring and enhancing the quality of our data and facilitating appropriate access, sharing and use of data so that its value can be leveraged for the benefit of all. The strategy is ambitious but realistic. It aims to strengthen the foundations of our data ecosystem and promote consistency of understandings and practice.

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to staff across the department and colleagues across the sector for their contribution to the development of this strategy. The support we received from the Design Team in DPENDR also deserves a special mention. The development of our data strategy has been, without question, a collective and worthwhile endeavour as a result of taking a design approach, and its implementation is much more likely to succeed given the engagement of senior managers, staff and the wider education community in the development process.

As we look forward, the direction is now clear. We have work to do and, done right, it will allow us to progress towards our long-term vision of an education data culture in which trusted, well-governed, accessible data is understood, supported and leveraged for the benefit of those who learn, teach and lead across the sector.

Bernie McNally

Secretary General, Department of Education



Background and Context

The realisation of the vision of the Department of Education, an education system where every child and young person feels valued and is actively supported and nurtured to reach their full potential, relies on meaningful engagement with data. Taking a coherent, strategic approach to the enhancement of data governance, management and use ensures that appropriate, quality data is available to inform decision making, support the design and implementation of policy and play an optimal role in the delivery of services within the department and beyond.

The most recent data strategy of the Department of Education, published in 2017, set out to build data capacity and capability, strengthen data management, strengthen data-related collaboration and maximise the use and value of data. In the years since the publication of the 2017 data strategy there were significant developments in the realm of data. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect in 2018, followed by the 2018 Data Protection Act, the 2019 Data Sharing and Governance Act and, in 2023, the European Data Act. The years 2019-23 also saw the implementation of Ireland's first Public Service Data Strategy. In the meantime, the pandemic placed unforeseen demands on the data infrastructure and processes within the department, providing an opportunity to identify strengths and areas where enhancements would be welcome. In addition, the establishment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in 2020 brought about structural changes to the department which had direct and indirect impacts on data governance, management, structures and processes.

The green and digital transitions at international policy level have also had impacts on data policy and practice in Ireland. We are all more aware of our responsibilities with respect to creating a sustainable future and more conscious of digital advances, such as AI, that have created opportunities for innovation and efficiency while also posing challenges for how we navigate new realities. Advances in the realm of digital technologies and sustainability, however, depend on optimal management and use of data. As a society, we are more conscious of both our data rights and the value of data for insights and learning. We have, rightly, developed higher expectations with respect to the transparency, efficiency, sustainability, ethics and general use of data.

It was considered timely, therefore, for the department to take a fresh look at its data ecosystem, consider what has been learned in recent years and determine the best next steps in ensuring optimal engagement with data to support the priorities of the department and the wider education sector. In 2023, a department-wide Data Group was established to oversee the development of a new data strategy and to inform and consider data developments more broadly. The Data Group, chaired at Assistant Secretary level, comprises Principal Officers from a number of relevant sections across the department, as well as agency representatives.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this data strategy is to provide considered, intentional direction for action, informed by an understanding of our context, and the needs and experiences of department staff and the wider education community. The strategy sets out a long-term vision for data and prioritises foundational steps that can be achieved in the next three years as we work towards that vision.

The strategy is rooted in the Department of Education's Statement of Strategy 2023-25, while aligning with the Public Service Data Strategy 2019-23 and the 2023-27 Open Data Strategy. It also takes cognisance of related policies and strategies at international and national levels such as the European Data Strategy, the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Civil Service Renewal 2030, Connecting Government 2030 and the National AI Strategy 2021.¹

Although the scope of the strategy is internal to the Department of Education, its benefits are likely to be felt by stakeholders across the sector and, as such, agencies and representative bodies were included in the strategy consultation process.

What we mean by data

Data in its broadest sense includes structured data fields (largely found in databases and systems) and also unstructured information such as documents, image or video files and social media posts. Different approaches are taken to manage each, and the scope of this strategy focuses mainly on structured data.²

¹ More detail on links between this data strategy and related national strategic developments can be found in Appendix A.

² A glossary of other relevant terms can be found in Appendix B.

Strategy Development Process

From the beginning of the process, it was decided to take a human-centred design approach to the development of the strategy, in line with the recently published [Design Principles for Government in Ireland](#). In essence, this meant ensuring that the needs and experiences of people, both our colleagues and the wider education community, were at the centre of all decision-making. As illustrated in Figure 1, various groups were invited to provide expertise, advice, suggestions and perspectives to inform the vision, principles, goals and actions outlined in this strategy.

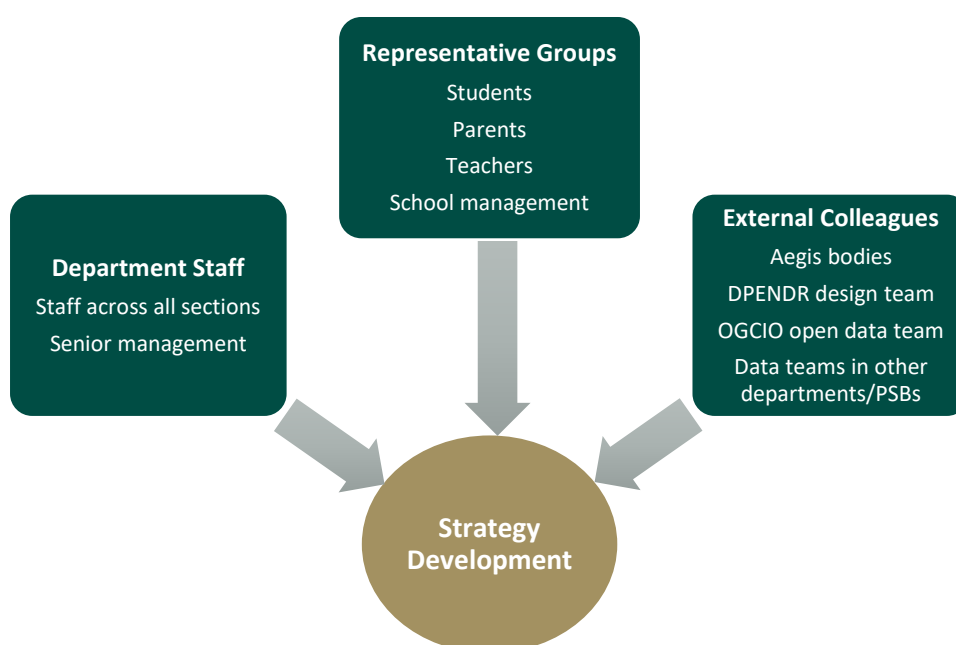


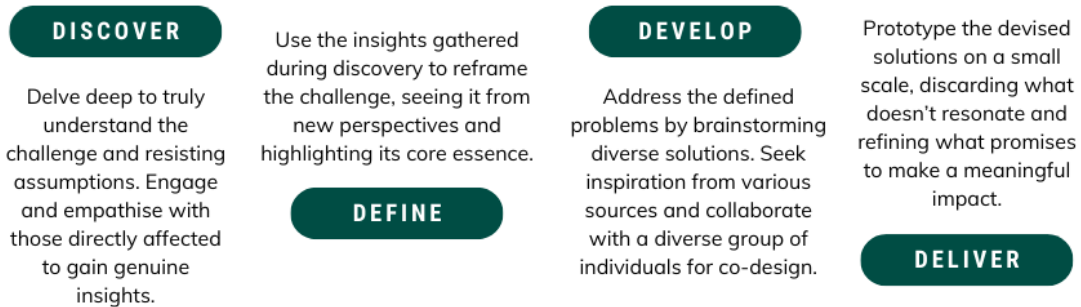
Figure 1 Stakeholders involved in the strategy development process³

Figure 2 illustrates the steps taken in the overall strategy development process, mapped against the steps of a typical design process as outlined in the [Action Plan for Designing Better Public Services](#). The strategy development process involved: desk research, exploring related strategies, policies and legislation; a data maturity assessment, allowing us to understand our existing processes and structures and benchmark our data maturity against pre-defined levels⁴; focus groups, discussions and workshops with department staff; and consultations with representative groups of learners, parents, teachers and school management. All of these elements informed the development of the current strategy document and will also serve to inform the strategy implementation process.

³ A list of the representative groups and aegis bodies referred to can be found in Appendix C.

⁴ More detail on the department's data maturity assessment can be found in Appendix D.

Phases of Typical Design Process



Strategy Development Process

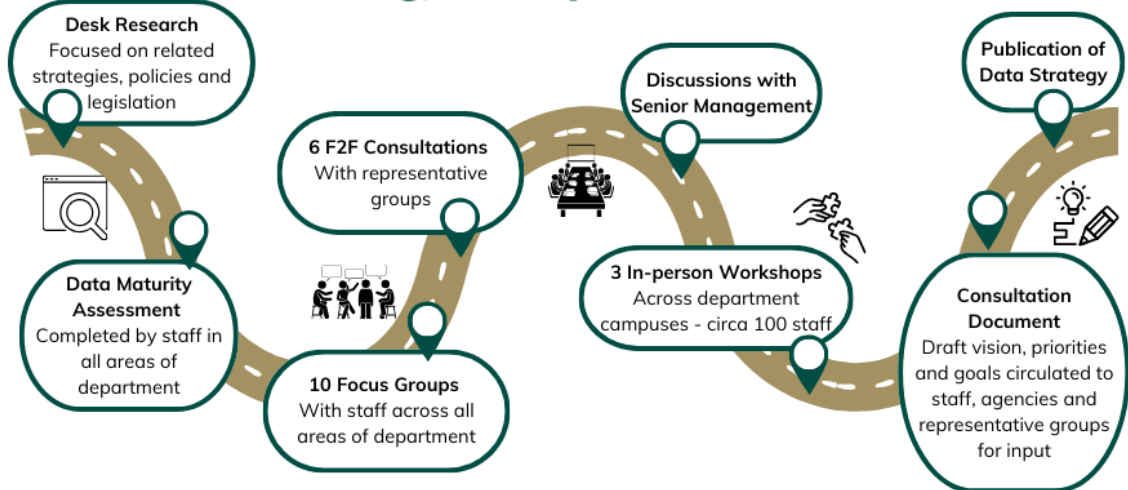


Figure 2 The strategy development process, mapped against a typical design process

Vision

An education data culture in which trusted, well-governed, accessible data is understood, supported and leveraged for the benefit of those who learn, teach and lead across the sector.

Principles

People

- We work in meaningful collaboration with colleagues and members of the wider education community and beyond to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes with respect to data.

Quality, trusted data

- We are in a position to understand and trust the accuracy of the data we hold.

Data as an input to informed decision-making

- Policy and practice decisions are informed by appropriate, robust, trustworthy data.

Efficiency and re-use

- We ensure processes and structures minimise duplication of effort and remove, where possible, any need to collect the same data more than once.

Understanding and accessibility

- We have systems and tools that allow data to be easily understood, and accessed by those with the authority to do so.

Ethics and transparency

- We process all data in a responsible, ethical, transparent manner.

Being future-focused and responsive

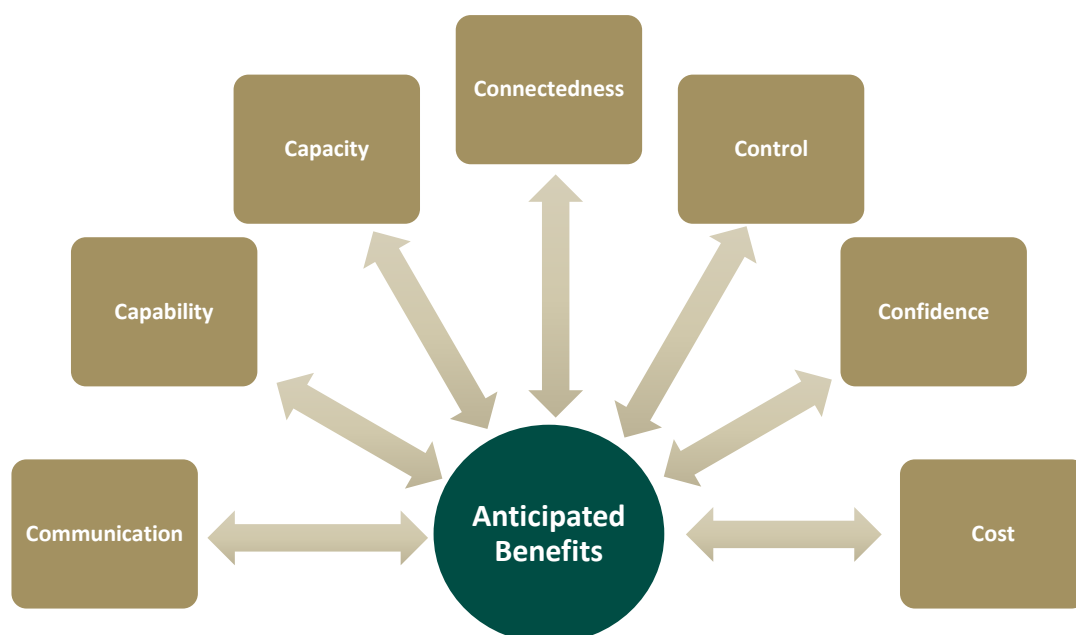
- We keep an eye to the future, remaining flexible and dynamic to best respond to changing contexts and needs across the education sector and beyond.

Effective data governance

- We optimise data governance policies and structures to ensure legislative compliance, clear data ownership and responsibilities, and a well-supported data landscape.

Anticipated Benefits

There are several benefits expected to result from the successful implementation of the 2024-27 Data Strategy. These benefits reflect the future towards which the strategy aspires.



Communication

- Communications around data will be enhanced and related knowledge and understandings shared across the department and beyond.

Capability

- Centralisation of data expertise and decision-making will allow related resourcing to benefit the whole department and uplift overall data capabilities.
- A strategic approach to data training and knowledge exchange will foster a reality where staff across roles have the data literacy, knowledge and skills they need to optimally leverage the value of data.
- A data catalogue and enhanced analytics platform will support ease of appropriate data access and an increase in analysis capabilities, as well as allowing for progress with respect to open data.

Capacity

- Data detective work to find, prepare and standardise data will decrease across the department, freeing up resources for other priorities.

- Analytics offerings will broaden and deepen across all sections and reliance on third parties will reduce over time.
- The data ecosystem will allow increased volume and velocity of data from both increased public service sharing and possible extended educational data points.

Connectedness

- The department will be positioned to progress towards its vision for data while aligning with wider government data efforts, as well as international policy and legislative developments.
- Meaningful collaboration with respect to data will be facilitated across the education sector and with other public bodies.

Control

- Accountability for action will be defined, understood and communicated, ensuring that individuals and sections are aware of their data responsibilities.
- Data risks will be recorded and mitigated.
- We will be better placed to define and embed appropriate data standards.
- Revitalised governance structures and practices will foster coordinated data decision-making and effective knowledge sharing within the department and beyond.

Confidence

- Publication of data governance and quality frameworks and controls will increase the knowledge and confidence of our staff.
- Risk reduction through increased standardisation of terminology, language and procedures.
- Increased department transparency and certainty regarding what data can be shared and how, both internally and externally.
- Increased confidence in data quality, an important prerequisite for open data sharing and for leveraging the potential of AI into the future.

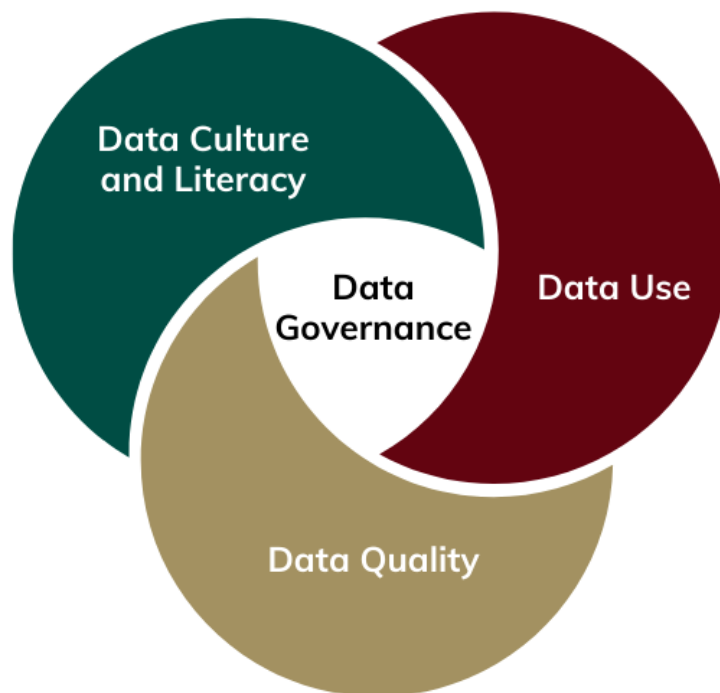
Cost

- Reduced costs where staff are spending effort cleansing the same data different times for different projects - adoption of a data quality framework will decrease duplication of remedial actions.
- Reduced costs where staff are spending effort searching for data from multiple sources - data catalogue will ensure business-critical data is appropriately discoverable with ease.

Key Priority Areas

In striving to achieve our long-term vision, while upholding core principles, the next three years present an opportunity to take important strategic steps. Discussion throughout the consultation process, informed by the wider strategic context, pointed to four priority areas worthy of attention and focus, as follows:

1. Strengthen data governance structures and processes
2. Uplift data culture and literacy
3. Focus on data quality
4. Facilitate optimal data use



Priority 1: Strengthen Data Governance Structures and Processes

Data governance is central to all data priorities in the department. Data governance focuses on how practical decisions are made about data and how people and processes are expected to behave in relation to data – how we can work together to best leverage data as an asset while ensuring personal data is both protected and secure. Good data governance requires consistent, standardised, practical supports and guidance to be in place to inform practice and decision-making, to minimise risk and to promote clarity of responsibility and accountability.

Recent years have seen the establishment of key senior structures within the department such as a central data governance function and a department-wide Data Group to oversee data developments, as well as key roles such as Data Protection Officer, Head of Governance and Risk and Chief Information Officer.

While these advances constitute a positive beginning, findings from the consultation suggested that there is still scope for improvement with respect to ensuring strong data governance across the department. There is a need for the rules governing data to be transparently and consistently understood and applied and an overarching data governance policy and associated support framework for data owners would be beneficial to this end.

A well-informed, collaboratively developed data governance policy and associated practical and supporting governance framework will provide an important foundation for all future data developments. They will allow data structures, procedures and understandings to be optimised and essential components of effective data management, proportionate to risk, to be established, integrated and utilised.

High-level Goal 1.1

Develop data governance policy and associated governance framework, clarifying ownership, roles and responsibilities for data management

Supporting Actions:

Action 1.1.1 Review existing policies, guidance and structures related to data governance

Action 1.1.2 Develop data governance policy and associated framework

Action 1.1.3 Communicate and embed governance policy and framework

Priority 2: Uplift Data Culture and Literacy

For data to be leveraged well across the department, it is imperative that all staff understand the benefits of how data can assist them in their day-to-day roles and how their engagement with data can affect broader outcomes for the department and the wider education community. In addition, staff need to have the appropriate skills, knowledge and tools to be able to use and manage data well.

Since the publication of the previous data strategy, the data landscape has evolved significantly, as have public expectations re data. Department policies and guidance have been developed in areas such as data protection, records management and information security. Data protection training has been undertaken by staff across sections and data understandings and collaboration have been fostered through the development of resources such as a data map, outlining what data is held where across sections of the department, and a data calendar detailing what data is collected from schools by which sections throughout the year.

The strategy consultation indicated that more work is needed in effectively communicating existing policies and guidance to ensure consistency of implementation across the department. It also illustrated the importance of ensuring that all department staff have the related understanding, skills and tools needed to optimally uphold their responsibilities and to gain accurate, timely insights from data as and when needed. Further, it was suggested that there would be merit in having more opportunities for data knowledge sharing and discussion between department colleagues and with colleagues in relevant bodies across the sector.

It is intended that the communication of policies and guidance will be examined, in consultation with staff and those with expertise in the area, to foster meaningful engagement and implementation in the future.

High-level Goal 2.1

Ensure appropriate communication of existing policies and guidance re data to foster consistency of implementation across the department

Supporting Actions:

Action 2.1.1 Explore, in consultation with staff and experts, the most appropriate communication channels and approaches to embed data policies, guidance and messaging

Action 2.1.2 Develop and implement data communications plan

A plan setting out general and targeted data-related training for staff of the department will be developed, in consultation with staff and those with expertise in the area, to ensure everyone has the knowledge and skills they need to gather, manage and use data

effectively, ensuring quality insights, transparency, security, and compliance with obligations. This plan will also include structured opportunities for sharing of knowledge and good practice across the department to allow colleagues to learn from each other and collectively solve common challenges.

High-level Goal 2.2

Develop and implement a training and knowledge-sharing plan for department staff on data management challenges, use of tools, and associated topics

Supporting Actions:

Action 2.2.1 Explore, in consultation with staff and experts, needs of the department with respect to data training and knowledge sharing

Action 2.2.2 Develop and implement data training and knowledge-sharing plan

Building on previous engagement with aegis bodies and representative groups and acknowledging the importance of sharing expertise and knowledge for the benefit of all, consideration will be given to the best way to ensure that relevant data topics and developments can be discussed with colleagues across the sector on a regular basis.

High-level Goal 2.3

Foster data knowledge sharing and discussions between the department and relevant bodies in the education sector

Supporting Actions:

Action 2.3.1 Explore options to enhance data knowledge sharing and discussions between the department and relevant bodies in the education sector

Action 2.3.2 Strengthen associated knowledge-sharing structures

Priority 3: Focus on Data Quality

Without trustworthy, quality data, the goal of evidence-informed policy and services, a high-level outcome of Civil Service Renewal 2030, becomes less attainable. Leveraging advances in technology, such as AI and advanced analytics, also relies primarily on the quality of data inputted.

The department has been contributing to inter-departmental initiatives focused on considering data as a strategic asset and building trust in the quality of data collected and stored across the system. As an example, through the National Data Infrastructure project, the department made significant increases in the use of Eircodes on active records, improving the quality and trustworthiness of related data.

In a large, complex organisation such as the department, maintaining data quality requires a standardised, cross-functional commitment and coordination. The strategy consultation highlighted the importance of having practical supports in place to support data quality and the benefits that would accrue from an internal quality monitoring framework for the department, which would allow the trustworthiness of key data elements to be better understood and enhanced.

The development of a data quality monitoring framework will involve identifying key data elements and agreeing data quality controls, assessment procedures, how data issues will be managed and ongoing quality monitoring procedures. In the long term, the framework will assist in reducing risks, improving efficiency and enhancing the trustworthiness of education data. The framework development will be informed by the Data Quality Framework for Public Service Bodies, due to be published by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer later in 2024.

High-level Goal 3.1

Develop a data quality monitoring framework for the department and conduct phased rollout amongst a number of sections

Supporting Actions:

Action 3.1.1 Develop data quality monitoring framework, informed by OGCIO Data Quality Framework for Public Service Bodies

Action 3.1.2 Conduct phased rollout of framework amongst selected sections of the department

Priority 4: Facilitate Optimal Data Use

It is very important that, while appropriately protecting personal data, the department fosters a confidence amongst staff regarding how data can be used and shared to increase efficiency, decrease administration burden and allow the value of data to be leveraged by our wider community.

In 2018, the department developed an internal data map which, although useful in allowing staff to view basic information about datasets held across the department, became outdated over time. In line with obligations under the 2021 Open Data Directive, the department also published an Open Data Publication Plan, outlining intentions for more data to be openly accessible to the wider public. The Education Statistics Data Hub, launched in 2023, was a further attempt to make it easier for the public to access key education data. A number of Data Sharing Agreements have also been established in recent years to allow department data to be shared securely with other public service bodies and an API between the Department of Education and the Department of Social Protection to share data electronically and replace related manual processes became the department's first API listed on the new Public Service API Catalogue.

Alongside the importance of greater general use of data by individual sections, the strategy consultation highlighted the benefits that would arise from more data sharing and re-use, where appropriate, internally between sections of the department and with other public service bodies, ensuring schools and others do not have to give the same data to the department more than once. The primary step towards realising this ambition is the development of a department data catalogue so that sections are aware of what key data is held where. In a complementary and parallel approach to this, the development of an integration roadmap under the ICT Strategy will ensure the technology is put in place to allow the appropriate systems within the department to integrate and share data to support seamlessly business processes and remove the need for re-collection of data where it is already available elsewhere. A third key deliverable is the development of a centralised data platform of the organisation's key data and making this data easily accessible to staff so they can directly access data insights and use and trust the data reporting from this platform. These efforts will also better position the department to make the publication of open data a matter of course in appropriate circumstances.

It is intended that the data catalogue will provide an overview of key department data assets, who the data owner is in each case and relevant important metadata.

High-level Goal 4.1

Develop a data catalogue focused on key business critical datasets

Supporting Actions:

Action 4.1.1 Conduct general survey to determine data currently held and identify business-critical data

Action 4.1.2 Scope practical technical approaches to storing the department's data catalogue and agree plan for development

Action 4.1.3 Develop and populate data catalogue focused on business-critical data

Ensuring a centralised platform exists, which has the relevant controls and governance in place, will enable key strategic opportunities and empower staff to leverage the value of existing data to reach key outcomes for the education community.

High-level Goal 4.2

Develop a centralised data platform to support enhanced reporting and analytics

Supporting Actions:

Action 4.2.1 Develop and agree data standards and data architecture guard rails which guide new system developments

Action 4.2.2 Design and build out infrastructure for the central data platform

Action 4.2.3 Prioritise and integrate approved key datasets onto the central data repository solution

Action 4.2.4 Implement a Data Use Case Initiative Tracker based on a 'problem driven' approach ensuring analytic capabilities focus on meeting business data needs and outcomes

Through mapping existing data and enhancing data platforms, opportunities will arise to consider what data can be published as open data through the national Open Data Portal and how this can best be achieved in an efficient and effective ongoing manner. Further,

opportunities can be leveraged for increased sharing of data, where appropriate, both within the department and with other public service bodies, and increased use of APIs.

High-level Goal 4.3

Increase understanding and publication of open data and appropriate sharing and re-use of data within the department and with other public service bodies

Supporting Actions:

Action 4.3.1 Plan for data openness at the design stage of projects and programmes across sections, as appropriate

Action 4.3.2 Explore option of leveraging the open data portal of the Central Statistics Office to support meeting our open data needs

Action 4.3.3 In tandem with the delivery of the ICT Strategy, enable the department to increase lawful data sharing within the department and with other public sector bodies, including increased use of APIs

Enablers for Success

The goals and actions set out in this strategy are the result of extensive consultation and research. Colleagues within the department and beyond have agreed that these are the best next steps for us to take. It would be remiss not to acknowledge, however, that the successful implementation of the strategy will depend on careful navigation of various challenges. Such challenges include organisational size and complexity, legacy structures, processes and technologies, competing priorities, knowledge management in the context of staff moves, skills and understanding re data, and balancing risk and innovation.

Collectively, the enablers detailed below outline the mindset and context that will be needed to allow the potential of this strategy to be fully realised.

Effective Communications

- The links between day-to-day data decisions and practices and larger-scale risks and successes need to be communicated well and often so that they are understood by all.
- There will be work involved in the implementation process, and the value of the actions taken and the benefits that will accrue need to be clearly communicated at each stage so that people understand the importance and benefits of the efforts they are making.

Meaningful Collaboration and Engagement

- It will be essential that the sense of collaboration and engagement that was evident during the strategy development process continues throughout the strategy implementation process.

Strategic Support

- The vision and ambitions set out in this strategy reflect an overall enhancement of the education data culture and such transformation takes time. People will need time to process new knowledge and to adapt to new practices. Visible, tangible leadership support will be imperative to enable the success of the strategy implementation.
- Key roles and collaborative structures, such as communities of practice, will be needed to allow consistency of understanding and practice to be embedded across sections.

Resourcing

- A range of human, financial and system resources will need to be in place and leveraged well to ensure the appropriate operating model, technology and expertise are available to empower everyone in engaging with data optimally.

Incremental Enhancement

- In taking a people-centred, strategic approach, it will be important that actions are ordered appropriately. The consultation revealed a strong appetite for change but not everything can be achieved at once and it will be important to scaffold enhancements in an incremental manner over time towards our overall long-term vision.

Summary of Goals and Actions

Priority 1: Strengthen Data Governance Structures and Processes	
Goal 1.1 Develop data governance policy and associated governance framework, clarifying ownership, roles and responsibilities for data management	Action 1.1.1 Review existing policies, guidance and structures related to data governance
	Action 1.1.2 Develop data governance policy and associated framework
	Action 1.1.3 Communicate and embed governance policy and framework
Priority 2: Uplift Data Culture and Literacy	
Goal 2.1 Ensure appropriate communication of existing policies and guidance re data to foster consistency of implementation across the department	Action 2.1.1 Explore, in consultation with staff and experts, most appropriate communication channels and approaches to embed data policies, guidance and messaging
	Action 2.1.2 Develop and implement data communications plan
Goal 2.2 Develop and implement a training and knowledge-sharing plan for department staff on data management challenges, use of tools, and associated topics	Action 2.2.1 Explore, in consultation with staff and experts, needs of the department with respect to data training and knowledge sharing
	Action 2.2.2 Develop and implement data training and knowledge-sharing plan
Goal 2.3 Foster data knowledge sharing and discussions between the department and relevant bodies in the education sector	Action 2.3.1 Explore options to enhance data knowledge sharing and discussions between the department and relevant bodies in the education sector
	Action 2.3.2 Strengthen associated knowledge-sharing structures

Priority 3: Focus on Data Quality	
Goal 3.1 Develop a data quality monitoring framework for the department and conduct phased rollout amongst a number of sections	Action 3.1.1 Develop data quality monitoring framework, informed by OGCIO Data Quality Framework for Public Service Bodies
	Action 3.1.2 Conduct phased rollout of framework amongst selected sections of the department
Priority 4: Facilitate Optimal Data Use	
Goal 4.1 Develop a data catalogue focused on key business critical datasets	Action 4.1.1 Conduct general survey to determine data currently held and identify business-critical data
	Action 4.1.2 Scope practical technical approaches to storing the department's data catalogue and agree plan for development
	Action 4.1.3 Develop and populate data catalogue focused on business-critical data
Goal 4.2 Develop a centralised data platform to support enhanced reporting and analytics	Action 4.2.1 Develop and agree data standards and data architecture guard rails which guide new system developments
	Action 4.2.2 Design and build out infrastructure for the central data platform
	Action 4.2.3 Prioritise and integrate approved key datasets onto the central data repository solution
	Action 4.2.4 Implement a Data Use Case Initiative Tracker based on a 'problem driven' approach ensuring analytic capabilities focus on meeting business data needs and outcomes
Goal 4.3 Increase understanding and publication of open data, and appropriate sharing and re-use of data within the department and with other public service bodies	Action 4.3.1 Plan for data openness at the design stage of projects and programmes across sections, as appropriate
	Action 4.3.2 Explore option of leveraging the open data portal of the Central Statistics Office to support meeting our open data needs
	Action 4.3.3 In tandem with the delivery of the ICT Strategy, enable the department to increase lawful data sharing within the department and with other public sector bodies, including increased use of APIs

Appendix A - Alignment with the National Strategic Context

Overall, the intentions set out in this data strategy align with the Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2023-25, simultaneously supporting many of the key education ambitions set out in Our Shared Future, the Programme for Government. In particular, the successful implementation of this data strategy will support Goal 4, Organisational Excellence and Innovation, of the Statement of Strategy 2023-25:

1. Deliver efficient and effective customer-centric practices that best serve the public, the Government and the Oireachtas.
2. Use systems design, creative thinking and an innovative culture to improve the quality of services we deliver and maximise the use of digital technology.
3. Continue to build the Department's capacity, ensuring we have people with the skills, knowledge, tools and equipment to deliver on our mission.
4. Continue to enhance our strategic planning capability, including horizon scanning and strategic foresight, to support design and delivery of the education system of the future.
5. Continue to monitor our performance, acknowledging success when achieved, learning when things can be improved, and committing to continuous quality improvement.

In addition to aligning broadly with the department's overall strategy, each of the four priority areas in the 2024-27 Data Strategy support and respond to specific national strategic and policy imperatives as follows:

Priority 1: Strengthen Data Governance Structures and Processes

Public Service Data Strategy 2019-23⁵

Theme 5.1 Protection and legislation

Theme 5.2 Governance and standards

Theme 5.3 Privacy and security

Theme 5.11 Capability

National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Ireland

Section 7.2 Data protection, ethics and privacy in the context of AI

⁵ The follow-up to the current Public Service Data Strategy is in development, and, although it is expected that broad alignment will be evident with the new strategy when published, adjustments to the department's strategy implementation will be made, as appropriate.

Priority 2: Uplift Data Culture and Literacy

Public Service Data Strategy 2019-23

Theme 5.11 Capability

Theme 5.13 Records management

Civil Service Renewal 2030

Theme 2 Digital first and innovation

- The work of staff augmented through appropriate analytical, automation and other digital tools

- An upskilled workforce and enhanced innovation capabilities across the Civil Service

Connecting Government 2030

Action Area 5: Strengthening digital skills

Priority 3: Focus on Data Quality

Public Service Data Strategy 2019-23

Theme 5.8 Trusted identifiers

Open Data Strategy 2023-27

Pillar 1 High-value and high-quality datasets that are responsive to users' needs

National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Ireland

Section 7.2 Access to quality data for AI

Priority 4: Facilitate Optimal Data Use

Public Service Data Strategy 2019-23

Theme 5.5 Interoperability

Theme 5.6 Analytics

Theme 5.7 Discovery

Theme 5.10 Transparency

Civil Service Renewal 2030

Theme 1 Evidence-informed policy and services - Policies based on enhanced data, analytics and insights

Open Data Strategy 2023-27

Pillar 2 Open data that is appropriately accessible, mobile and reuseable

Pillar 3 Trusted open data sources benefitting our stakeholder communities

Connecting Government 2030

Action Area 2: Harnessing data effectively

National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Ireland

Section 7.2 Access to open government data for AI

Appendix B - Glossary

API

An Application Programming Interface (API) is a software intermediary that allows two computers or applications to talk to each other.

Business critical data item

A business critical data item is a data item that an organisation has identified as being critical to business outcomes or which must be retained for regulatory purposes. It is usually a data item which is used to inform business decisions and/or rules, or which may be shared with other parties who rely on it for their purposes.

Data accessibility

Data accessibility refers to accessibility of data in its broadest sense and is the general ease with which any user can find, retrieve, understand and use data within an organisation.

Data asset

A data asset is a business critical data item, or group of items, that is held by an organisation, including data held in IT systems, databases, excel files or any other data repositories and it also includes outputs of data initiatives, such as reports, models and analytic dashboards.

Data catalogue

A data catalogue is a comprehensive inventory of an organisation's key data assets. It provides information (metadata) about data assets including business descriptions, data ownership, technical information and can also include usage or classification guidance to support data governance. Overall, when managed and maintained appropriately, it enhances and transforms data accessibility and usability within an organisation.

Data governance

Data governance refers to defining structures which have the appropriate standards and guidelines necessary to ensure accountability and proper management of data assets. Such structures include rules, policies, procedures, roles and guidelines, which combine to create an environment promoting data accuracy, consistency, completeness, availability, transparency and security. It encompasses the people, processes and technology used to ensure that key data is appropriately defined, used and maintained in order to deliver integrated services for citizens and businesses.

Data literacy

Data literacy is about people having the knowledge, skills and capability to explore, understand and use data relevant to their role in an organisation.

Data management

Data management refers to the process of handling and arranging an organisation's data effectively. It involves collecting, storing, securing, transforming and using data for decision-making.

Data maturity assessment

A method for organisations to assess their current data management capability by examining their data management processes and procedures in a range of different data areas and benchmarking these processes and procedures against pre-defined levels of maturity.

Data owner

Data owner is a specific data governance role which is assigned to a senior individual in an organisation with ultimate responsibility for a specific dataset. A data owner oversees the data governance of the assigned dataset which includes ensuring compliance with relevant internal policies and broader legislation including data protection. A data owner will rely on internal organisational supports such as a Data Protection Officer and can often assign key support roles such as Data Stewards to assist them in discharging the accountabilities of their role. A data owner is the approval authority for decisions about the sharing and release of the given data.

Data protection

Data protection refers to the processing of personal data, setting out obligations on data controllers and processors, and providing strengthened protections for data subjects.

Data quality

The state of completeness, validity, consistency, timeliness and accuracy that makes data appropriate for a specific use.

Data sharing agreement

A data sharing agreement sets out the framework for the sharing of personal data between parties and defines the principles and procedures that the parties shall adhere to and the responsibilities the parties owe to one another.

Data standards

Data standards are an agreed documented set of organisational guidelines which describe how data items should be defined and structured within an organisation. Data standards ensure consistency across items such as data formats, naming conventions, units of measurement, and other specific business themes which may be present across an individual organisation domain. By adhering to data standards, organisations can enhance interoperability between systems, increase data quality and enable easier data sharing with approved wider stakeholders.

DPENDR

Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform

Data architecture

Data architecture is focused on ensuring data assets are managed in a way that aligns them to the broader organisational enterprise architecture. The components of data architecture include conceptual, logical and physical data models. Data architecture establishes a vision for data in the strategic sense whereas data management relates to day-to-day operations.

GDPR

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies to all EU member states since 25 May 2018. The GDPR provides better protection for personal data and more ways to manage the processing of personal data.

Information security

Information security (also known as InfoSec) relates to the practice of safeguarding an organisation's information and extends to various forms of data. The primary goal of information security is to prevent unauthorised access, disclosure, alteration or destruction of sensitive information. It encompasses physical and environmental security, access control and cybersecurity measures.

Metadata

Metadata is information about data. It does not contain the actual content of the data but merely describes it. Having reliable, clear and concise metadata for key organisational datasets makes it far easier to understand and work with individual datasets.

OGCIO

Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

Open data

The concept of open data is about making data held by public bodies available and easily accessible online for reuse and redistribution. Open data gives everyone access to non-personal government data which can deliver enhanced economic, social, environmental and democratic benefits to all.

PSB

Public Service Body

Records management

The efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including process for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records.

Appendix C - Representative Groups and Aegis Bodies

Representative groups invited to participate in the strategy consultation process

An Foras Pátrúnachta

Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools

Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland

Catholic Primary Schools Management Association

Church of Ireland Board of Education

Educate Together

Education and Training Boards Ireland

Fórsa

Gaeloideachas

Irish National Teachers' Organisation

Irish Primary Principals' Network

Irish Second-Level Students' Union

Joint Managerial Body

Muslim Primary Education Board

National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education

National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

National Parents Council

Teachers' Union of Ireland

Aegis bodies involved in the strategy consultation process

Educational Research Centre

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

National Council for Special Education

State Examinations Commission

The Teaching Council

Appendix D - Data Maturity Assessment

In line with a recommendation in the 2019-23 Public Service Data Strategy, the Department of Education set out, in late 2023, to conduct a data maturity assessment (DMA), enabling staff across the department to assess the current level of maturity and define a desired target state worthy of focus in the coming years. The DMA process aligned with guidance published by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and was supported by Derilinx Ltd.

The process involved the following steps:

Step 1: Online Assessment

Every Principal Officer/equivalent area of the department completed an online assessment form containing 51 questions across 11 knowledge areas. For each question, staff in the area were asked to rate a given data topic on a scale from one to five. Open-ended questions were also included to give respondents the opportunity to explain their responses. The 5 maturity levels and the 11 knowledge areas are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Levels of maturity and knowledge areas, as per guidance from OCGIO, based on the DAMA-DMBoK data maturity framework

Levels of Data Maturity		
Level 1	Initial/Ad Hoc	Processes are reactive with absence of data ownership or accountability
Level 2	Repeatable	Some processes and roles are defined with consistency starting to emerge in terms of tools and knowledge
Level 3	Defined	Emerging data management capability with centralised definition of processes and coordination of data policy
Level 4	Managed	Recommended tools and processes are being use consistently. Processed are quantified and controlled
Level 5	Optimised	Focus is on continuous improvement as data processes are highly consistent and predictable
Knowledge Areas		
Data Governance	Guides all other data management functions. Ensures data is managed properly, according to the organisations' policies and best practices.	

Data Architecture	Defines the blueprint for managing data assets in order to align with the organisation's strategy, meeting business and technical requirements.
Data Modelling & Design	Process of discovering, analysing, representing, and communicating data requirements in a precise form is called the data model. The process is iterative and may include a conceptual, logical, and physical model. Data models depict and enable an organisation to understand its data assets.
Data Storage & Operations	Design, implementation and support of stored data to maximise value. Operations provide support throughout the data lifecycle from planning through to disposal of data.
Data Security	Ensures that data privacy and confidentiality are maintained, that data is not breached, and that data is accessed appropriately.
Data Integration & Interoperability	Processes related to the movement and consolidation of data within and between data stores, applications, and organisations.
Document & Content Management	Planning, implementation, and control of activities used to manage the lifecycle of data and information found across the organisation outside of databases, such as on eDocs, Hive sites and other unstructured data locations.
Data Warehousing & Business Intelligence	Planning, implementation, and control processes to store data and enable value to be obtained through analysis and reporting.
Metadata	Planning, implementation, and control activities to enable access to high quality, integrated metadata. It includes definitions, glossaries, data flows, and other information critical to understanding data and the systems through which it is created, maintained, and accessed.
Data Quality	Planning and implementation of quality management techniques to measure, assess, and improve the fitness of data for use within the organisation.
Reference & Master Data	Managing shared data to reduce redundancy and ensure better data quality through standardised definition and use of data values.

Step 2: Group Discussions

Following the online assessment, participants each took part in one of 10 two-hour focus group discussions where the current state of structures, processes and practices across the 11 knowledge areas were discussed in more detail. The focus groups also provided an opportunity to discuss what the best next steps were for data in the department.

Step 3: Analysis and Discussion of Insights

The quantitative and qualitative results from the assessment and focus groups were analysed, and discussed further at staff workshops and at meetings of senior management. These discussions focused on insights gained, areas of strength and opportunities for enhancement.

The DMA insights and related discussions were then combined with outputs of other aspects of the strategy development process to determine data priorities over the coming years, as reflected in this strategy document.