

Pearson response to the DfE Consultation
 Accountability: publishing headline performance
 measures on school and college websites
 July 2014

Organisation details

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.
Reason for confidentiality:
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Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation. ✓
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Please place a 'x' in the box below that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Primary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Free school	<input type="checkbox"/>	University technical college	<input type="checkbox"/>	School sixth form
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sixth form college	<input type="checkbox"/>	16-19 academy	<input type="checkbox"/>	16-19 free school
<input type="checkbox"/>	Independent school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent
<input type="checkbox"/>	Student	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other		

Please Specify: Educational service provider

Accountability: publishing headline performance measures on school and college websites

Pearson's view

Please consider the text below as our main response to the consultation. Below this we have briefly answered the questions in the consultation form, referring back to the relevant section in this text in order to expand on our suggestions where appropriate.

1. Holding schools to account and empowering parents

We are strongly in favour of the changes the government has recently made to the accountability system for primary and secondary schools and 16-19 providers. As we argued in our responses to the consultations on these changes, we believe that performance measures should provide a clear imperative for *all* schools to help *all* children make the maximum amount of progress possible, and we are delighted to see progress established as the principal way in which all educational institutions will be judged.

We are also very much in favour of ensuring that performance measures are made available as simply and prominently as possible to students and parents. In a system which enables and requires students and parents to make choices (or, at least, indicate preferences) about which school or college they attend, it is vital that they can do so based on clear evidence of the performance of that school or college. And in order to ensure a level playing field between young people from different backgrounds, it is essential that this information is as easy to find, and easy to interpret, as possible.

2. Keeping it simple but making it useful

It is right that the headline measures for each type of institution listed in the consultation document should be made available to students and parents, and that this should be done in a visual way. However, in the spirit of keeping the data as easy to interpret as possible, we would suggest that one measure is chosen as the key piece of information all students and parents should know about their current or prospective school or college, and that that one measure should be the progress that institution enables its pupils to make. We should make it as easy as possible for students and parents, of course, to delve deeper into the data and explore other measures, but the progress measure should be the one that is most clearly and prominently displayed¹.

In addition, students and parents need to be able easily to make comparisons between different institutions. The way in which the deeper performance data is presented, therefore, needs to provide both an at-a-glance view of how an

¹ It may be appropriate to require 16-19 providers to display two pieces of progress data: one showing progress at Level 3 and one showing progress at Level 2, with the latter focusing on English and maths. Ultimately, when we are more confident about the robustness of destination data, it may be appropriate to prioritise this over progress data for 16-19 providers.

institution is performing against national averages, and to enable comparisons with other local schools and colleges.

We also need to take into account the fact that performance can change over time, and that providing a snapshot of a single year may, in some cases, be misleading. This is likely to be particularly the case for smaller schools, where differences between cohorts can be marked. Prioritising progress over attainment may make this less of an issue, but it is still important to be able to explore how a school or college's performance may have changed over time.

The challenge, then, is to ensure that the key performance indicators of a school or college can be accessed and understood by everyone, while providing more detailed information to students and parents who want to delve deeper into the data. We make some suggestions below as to how we think this could be achieved.

3. Minimising the burden on schools and colleges

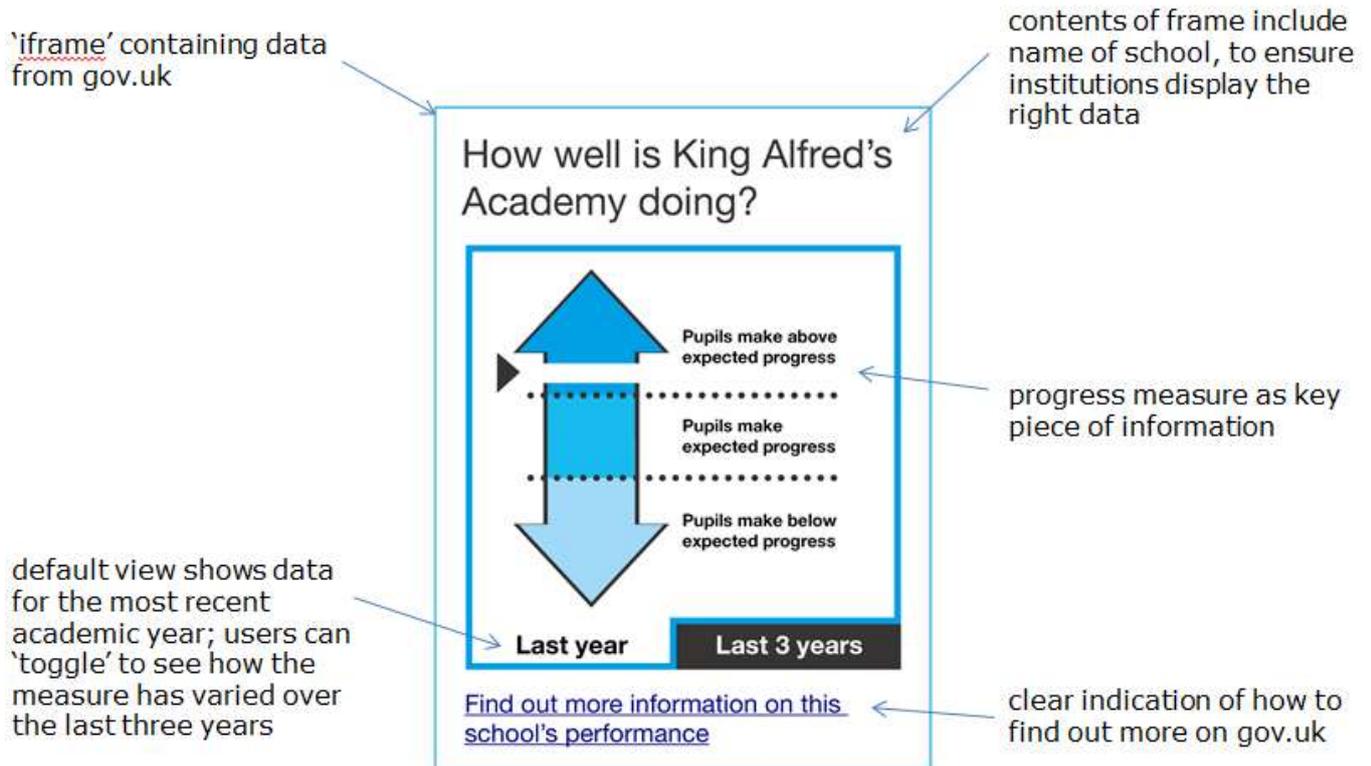
We agree with the suggestion that schools and colleges be required to display information on their performance prominently on their own websites. Most current and prospective students and parents will visit these sites, and this is a key way of ensuring that this information is brought to the attention of *all* students and parents, not just those who are willing and able to find, and trawl through, the relevant information on gov.uk.

However, there are more and less effective ways to do this. In order to maximise the benefits and minimise potential problems, we suggest the following:

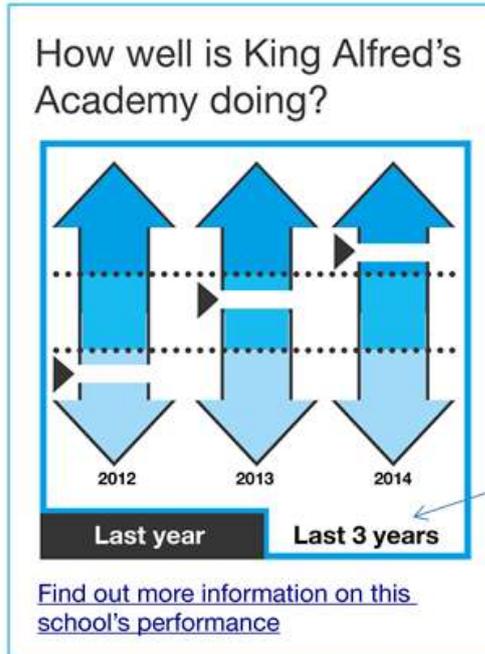
- a. Schools and colleges should be required to display a simple graphic on their homepage. This should show the institution's progress measure, and include a clear indication that users can click on the image to delve deeper into this school or college's performance, and to compare it with other institutions. We suggest users should be able to choose whether to view this indicator for the most recent year, or for the last three years (see visuals below).
- b. Clicking on the image should take the user to a section of the gov.uk website where more detailed comparative data is held. This should be designed to enable users easily to find out more about the institution whose website they have just left, and to compare it with other local schools and colleges.
- c. The progress graphic on every school or college's website should be provided to the institution as a piece of html embed code, which they will need to ask their website administrator to embed into their site (much as one might embed a BBC video in another website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/help/7895116.stm>). The image will then appear in an 'iframe' on the school or college's website, which draws on data from the host (gov.uk) website. Any changes made to the data on the gov.uk website will therefore automatically appear on the school or college's website simultaneously.

4. Presenting the data clearly

The visual approach to presenting performance measures suggested in the consultation document is good, and will certainly help students and parents to better understand the data. We think, however, that there may be ways to make the data even clearer. Our user experience experts came up with the following as one way of doing this²:



² We have chosen King Alfred's Academy in the following visuals purely in order to represent how the performance data could be displayed on a real school website. The progress indications included are fictional.



← toggling to 'Last 3 years' enables users to see performance over time

iframe displayed on school's home page

The screenshot shows the King Alfred's Academy website. At the top left is the logo 'KINGALFRED'S ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE TOGETHER'. To the right are links for 'VLE', 'VLE-Parents', and 'Old Alfredians'. Further right is the 'Ofsted Outstanding' logo. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links: 'Home', 'VAT', 'About King Alfred's', 'College life', 'Admissions', 'Academic', 'Sport', 'Teaching school', and 'Parents'. The main content area features a photo of students on a hike with the caption 'DofE Silver Training'. To the right is a performance chart titled 'How well is King Alfred's Academy doing?' which compares 'Last year' and 'Last 3 years' progress. Below the chart is a link: 'Find out more information on this school's performance'. At the bottom left is a video player for 'KINGALFRED'S ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE TOGETHER' with a play button and a 'vimeo' logo. At the bottom right is a 'News' section with five items: 'KA Karting Team Reach National Finals', '£3.5m bid Secured for new Restaurant and Teaching Classroom Block on Centre Site', 'The Earl and Countess of Wessex Visit King Alfred's Academy', 'Teachers take receipt of Betjeman Millennium Park Curriculum Resource Pack', and 'Sixth Former Katy Spiers chosen as Young Mayor of Sainsbury's 2013 School Games'.

5. Making the data source available

We would urge the government to ensure the raw data behind these measures is freely available, and to encourage individuals or organisations to use the data to build apps that interrogate the data in new ways. Doing this will cast new light on the information, and add to our understanding of school and college performance.

6. Key recommendations

In summary, then, we welcome the direction of this consultation, and would recommend the following in order to ensure it achieves its aims as effectively as possible:

1. The DfE should require all schools and colleges to display a graphic on their website which focuses on the progress they enable their pupils to make, compared to schools with similar intakes.
2. The DfE should provide this graphic as an 'iframe', with the data hosted on gov.uk.
3. Students and parents should be able to click on this graphic and be taken to a page on gov.uk with more information on that school or college.
4. The performance information on gov.uk should be carefully designed to ensure students and parents can easily view all the key measures for a school or college, see how these have changed over time, and compare them with other institutions.
5. The government should make the raw data behind these measures freely available, and encourage individuals and organisations to interrogate it in different ways.

Questions

Presentation of headline measures

- 1 Do you agree that the headline measures should be presented in a standard way?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure
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Comments:

It is important to present the headline measures in a clear and consistent way if we are to ensure that as many students and parents as possible are able to access and understand school performance data, and so make informed choices about their education.

- 2 Do you agree that there should be a visual presentation of the data to aid understanding?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure
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Comments:

Presenting the data visually makes it much more accessible – a key consideration if we are to ensure that *all* students and parents can make informed choices, not just those who are willing and able to study detailed performance tables.

- 3 Do you have any different suggestions for how the data might be presented visually?

Comments:

See **section 4** of 'Pearson's view' above for our thoughts on this.

- 4 Will the examples given above improve understanding and meet the aims set out at the beginning of this document?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
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Comments:

We believe the direction of this consultation is to be welcomed, and think that our recommendations, if implemented, would help to ensure it meets its aims.

- 5 Where should these measures be available?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School and college websites	<input type="checkbox"/> BBC website	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOV.UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

Comments:

We agree with the suggestion that it should be statutory for a school or college to display key information about their performance on the front page of their website. However, we need to guard against

- a) providing too much information, making it hard for all parents to engage with it;
- b) requiring schools to give up too much of their homepage 'real estate';
- c) creating something that it will be difficult for schools with minimal technical expertise to implement.

We would recommend, therefore, that school and colleges should be required to display a single image, showing their institution's progress measure, on their homepage. Users should be able to click on this image and link through to gov.uk, where they can access, and interrogate, the wider range of performance measures available for that school, and to compare those with other schools. See **section 3** above for more detailed suggestions on this.

Data Application (widget)

- 6 Do parents experience problems finding school or college performance information and using it to compare one provider to another?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
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Comments:

There is a wealth of information provided in the school performance tables on education.gov.uk, but it is difficult to navigate and doesn't make it easy to compare schools and colleges. Our conversations with parents suggest they would welcome an approach that is simple to use and focuses on the most important measures.

- 7 Do you agree that a data application should be developed and installed locally to allow schools and colleges to comply with the requirement to publish headline measures in a standard format on their website?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure
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Comments:

It isn't clear from the consultation documents exactly what is meant by a 'data application'. Our recommendation is that the DfE should provide schools and colleges with a piece of html embed code for them to embed into their website, which would display the institution's progress measure, and link through to gov.uk for students and parents who want to delve deeper into the data, and to compare this institution against others.

- 8 Do you agree that the requirements for the application set out at Annex A are the right ones?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure
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Comments:

With the caveat that, as outlined above, we think that this should be achieved through the provision of html embed code, and that it should focus on the progress measure, with other measures accessible by clicking through to the gov.uk website.

- 9 Are there any technical issues for your website that you think we should be aware of?

Comments:

N/A

- 10 Does your school or college have the capability to install a data application ("widget") on its website?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
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Comments:

N/A

However, our extensive experience of providing digital products and services to schools and colleges makes us very aware of the extent to which the level of technical expertise varies across institutions. Many schools and colleges, particularly small primary schools, need substantial support in implementing new technology. We would therefore urge the government to ensure that the proposed solution is kept as simple as possible. As outlined above, we believe that providing html embed code is the simplest approach.

- 11 If you are a school or college, would you be willing to pilot the data application before it is rolled out nationally?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Sure
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Comments:

N/A

Ensuring compliance

- 12 Do you think the availability of a data application ("widget"), together with changes to the School Information Regulations and funding agreements, encourage compliance with the requirement to publish headline measures on school and college websites?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Sure
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Comments:

Changes to the regulations are likely to encourage compliance. Combining this with a simple implementation approach, as outlined above, should maximise the chances of success.